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THE OCEAN HUNTERS; Or, THE CHASE OF LEVIATHAN

A ROMANCE OF PERILOUS ADVENTURE.

BY CAPTAIN MAYNE REID,



MY FIRST WHALE HUNT.

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CHAPTER I.

IN SEARCH OF FLAMINGOES.

To me there is no part of the world fraught with greater interest than that one of the Southern United States called Louisiana. It was there I first set foot on American soil, a youthful fledgling just escaped from college, full of aspirations after Nature in its wildest and most primitive freshness.

And nowhere could I have found it wilder or fresher than in this same Louisiana. A territory of vast extent, larger than France, with a varied surface, part forest, part prairie, both in many places pathless and impassable by reason of there being pure swamp-land, where horse may not set hoof, nor man foot: a lush, vigorous vegetation, almost tropical in character, comprising indigenous trees of more than a hundred species, among them the grand laurel-like magnolia, with its leaves that look as if varnished, and flowers having the diameter of a dinner-plate; the palmetto, with fan-shaped fronds; the amber-distilling gum and the dark, deciduous cypress—this often silvery-white from its drapery of the hair-like parasite known as "Spanish moss," or "old man's beard," (*Tillandsia usneoides*). These, with a score of other silvan novelties, failed not to catch my eye, and impress me with an interest in Nature's works stronger than I had ever felt before; all the more, after the monotony of a long sea voyage lasting eight weeks. For I speak of a time when the steam funnel had not yet belched forth its black smoke over the blue waters of the Mexican Gulf.

And if the *sylva* and *flora* of Louisiana delighted me, not less did its *fauna*. On its savannas browsed deer in herds uncountable; through its forests roamed the puma—locally called panther—lording it over lesser quadrupeds of the predatory kind, as the wolf, lynx, fox, with polecats, opossums, and raccoons. In its slow-flowing streams—*bayous*—and lagoons that gigantic reptile, the alligator—often found a full rod in length—held undisputed dominion, making prey of fish, flesh and fowl, anything having the ill-luck to stray within the grasp of its wide, gaping jaws, or the stroke of its sinewy tail. Finally, there flew through the air, or sat on the waters, big birds, some of them brilliantly beautiful, as the snow-white egret, the great Louisiana crane, the blue heron, and, brightest of all, the scarlet flamingo; while above soared in majestic flight vultures, and various species of the *falconidae*, as the singular fork-tailed kite, the osprey, and white-headed eagle.

Inspired by the instincts of a sportsman, it is superfluous to say that, with this plenitude of game, Louisiana seemed the very spot I was in search of; and not long had I landed there before proceeding to beat up its covers, and explore the wildest recesses of its swamps, savannas and forests. For a period of more than six months I spent almost every day in excursions around New Orleans, its capital city; extending them to a radius of full fifty miles—sometimes afoot, more seldom on horseback, and oftenest in a boat along its bayous.

Still I was not satisfied. In all these expeditions I had failed to find the species of game which I most desired to get into my bag—the flamingo. I had been told there were flocks of these resplendent birds in the great marshes around the Mississippi's mouth, and that somewhere along the outside coast they had a breeding-place, where they might be seen sitting, or rather standing straddled over their nests in the act of incubation. Curious to witness this odd spectacle, I was willing to pay well for it. But among all the guides and boatmen, whom I had hitherto engaged, none knew exactly where the flamingoes were to be found.

I had almost given up hope of being able to add the skin of one to my chase trophies, when chance ordered it otherwise. The lucky accident was due to my making the acquaintance of a man whom I had met in the hotel where I was staying—the celebrated "St. Charles's." There was nothing very remarkable in the outward appearance of this individual, save his wearing a uniform, that of an officer of the United States Revenue service. He had been introduced to me by a friend as Captain Macy, commanding the revenue cutter Alert, then on station by the mouth of the Mississippi, with range along the coast adjacent. We dined together, and after dinner the conversation turning on the chase, and the animals available for it in that particular district, I chanced casually to speak of my desire to have a day's flamingo shooting, and the fact of my having hitherto been unable to meet with these birds. I even expressed a doubt of their existence in Louisiana.

"Flamingoes!" exclaimed Captain Macy, in response to my declaration of incredulity. "I've shot scores of them myself."

"Where?" I inquired.

"Why, all around the coast westward of the river's mouth. There's a big rookery of them—I suppose I should call it 'flamingery'—not far from the island of Barataria, where the old buccaneer Lafitte used to bring his piratical craft to anchor."

Need I say that this unexpected piece of intelligence but sharpened my longing to go after the flamingoes, and I expressed a determination to pay a visit to the pirate's isle—if possible, as I put it.

"If possible!" rejoined the revenue officer. "What is there impossible about it? If you're willing to put up with such accommodation as a revenue cutter can afford—rough, I may tell you—you'll be welcome to spend a week—a month if you like it better—on board the Alert. And I'll take you to a place where you can shoot flamingoes—ay, slaughter them, till you have enough to fill a whale-boat."

Bargain struck there and then; its upshot, my finding myself in the cutter, and cruising off the Mississippi's mouth in less than twenty-four hours after.

True to his promise, Captain Macy conducted me to a breeding-place of the birds I so much desired to see at home in their native haunts. Indeed, I believe no one has ever looked at these bright-plumaged, long-legged creatures, stuffed and mounted on the shelf of a museum, without wishing to know something more about them than is told in cyclopedias or the ordinary books on ornithology.

Many people fancy there is but one kind of flamingo, the great scarlet bird (*Phoenicopterus ruber*) usually seen mounted at the museums. But there are several distinct species, inhabiting the three continents of Asia, Africa and America; all tropical, however, though not all confining their range to the sea coast. For some are also found along the banks of rivers and the shores of inland lakes. The species with which I became acquainted through the introduction of Captain Macy was different from the common red flamingo; being, in point of fact, the New World representative of these unique birds, known to naturalists as the *Phoenicopterus Chilensis*. It differs in several respects from its Old World congeners, but especially in the color of its plumage, this being more of an orange than scarlet.

In fine, after making a *razzia* on the rookery, or, as my friend still jokingly persisted in calling it, "flamingery," I was satisfied to let them alone. All the more, since around that same coast were many other objects equally claiming attention, not only things pertaining to the chase and the study of natural history, but history of another kind, *souvenirs* of the early exploration of Louisiana by the Spaniard, De Soto, and still later its colonization by the Frenchman, La Salle; with many a romantic episode of more modern times, as the escapades of Lafitte and his piratical crew, with their revelings on the isle of Barataria.

But Captain Macy could tell other tales than those relating to Louisiana and its past; adventures of which he was himself the hero. He was a man who had not only seen much of the world, but taken part in its action. More than one part had he played on the stage of life; although, as he modestly put it, never a conspicuous one. He had been all through the Texas wars, when the spirited little republic of the "Lone Star" was fighting for independence; and, at an earlier period of his life, had borne a part in several of the South American revolutionary struggles. But, antecedent to all these, and when yet but a boy, he had other experiences to tell of, quite as interesting as his tales of battles and sieges. For he had been a whaler; and the narration of his many perils and hair-breadth 'scapes while in the pursuit of this industry, while fascinating me with its fresh originality, imparted a knowledge of the great deep and its denizens, much of which will no doubt be new to those who read "The Chase of Leviathan," whether they be themselves young or old.

And I here recount his adventures in the same order as they were related to me; if not precisely in his own words, as near to them as my memory enables me to make it. So, reader, take note, that you are not any longer listening to me, but to Captain Macy—the man who actually chased "Leviathan."

CHAPTER II.

A "BLUBBER-HUNTER."

THOUGH country-born—I might say in the backwoods, for I first drew breath in a thinly-settled district of western New York—I had, from earliest boyhood, a longing for "a life on the ocean wave, and a home on the rolling deep." I had often heard that song, and no other so delighted me. My disposition for such a life was no doubt inherited from my father, who had been an officer in the navy. But, just because of his having been so, and getting drowned by the sinking of a ship—in which he was first lieutenant—my mother would not hear of my following the same profession. It had bereaved her once, and she was determined not to let it do so a second time.

I cannot say that I ever knew my father, his death having occurred while I was but a little shaver in long clothes. But during my days of boyhood I was accustomed to hear much talk of him, all in his favor. "Every inch a sailor," was a phrase often applied to him, and this not only by his surviving relatives and friends, but the public at large. He had been, in truth, a skilled officer and thorough seaman; besides a man of many adventures and daring deeds, to which last he was indebted for transference from forecastle to quarter-deck.

Listening to the tales of his exploits—sure of being told whenever our family circle was enlarged by the advent of visitors—as much as aught else, may have shaped my predilections for the sea. But, whatever the cause, or how imbibed, this passion grew stronger with my growth, despite all my mother's efforts to thwart and trample it out. Her intentions were that I should follow the profession of the law, and for this end was I being educated. But the dullest of books did naught to dull my natural longings; instead, made them the keener; and each succeeding holiday, when home from school, I made fresh onsets on my mother, entreating her to procure for me the appointment of midshipman in the navy. She could have got this easily enough; for she had in-

fluence, her family being one of the F. F.'s, to say nothing of my father's posthumous fame.

Spite of all, she was deaf to my entreaties. The old grief still preyed upon her, and her dislike for the sea, seeming instinctive, continued as strong as my liking for it.

For a period of several years, upon this ticklish question there arose many a discussion between us, with, at intervals, ~~war~~ and foul weather; I making the attack with all the arguments I could muster, she standing on the defense vigorously, and I may add successfully. For, on whatever side lay reason or the justice of the case, the discussion always ended by her sternly denying my wishes. A lawyer she meant me to be; indeed, she had hopes—what American mother has not?—that I, her son, might some day be President of the United States—the legal profession, as a rule, being the straightest road to this high preferment. Possibly the same instinct which inspired me with a love for the sea also imbued me with a hatred for what all sailors, and I might add all honest men hate—the law. Of myself I absolutely abhorred it, and could not bear the thought of being one of its "limbs." So at length, convinced my mother would never yield, I cut the Gordian knot, by taking a surreptitious departure from home—in common parlance, I ran away from it.

As a matter of course my first tack was made for New York city. Not that I meant staying there, for I had no such intention. My future home was to be the sea, and I only sought our great American metropolis as the center and starting-point for all ocean adventure, which is a way it is. No port in the world shows a larger number of ships, or a greater variety of national ensigns. The flags of every maritime country in the world may be seen unfurled and waving there. So I had not mistaken the place most likely to launch me on the seas. New York was that, if any.

The difficulty was about taking the first steps—making my *debit* as a mariner. This for a time troubled, even distressed me, seeming impossible to be got over. I was barely sixteen, and although well up in book knowledge—for my age educated better than common—I knew nothing else; not a thing by which I might make a livelihood either on land or on sea. To offer myself on board a ship, for service of any sort, would be to meet sure refusal. I did not know this at first, but became aware of it after several times trying.

Just as I had reached the despairing point and had almost given it up, I came across a man, who, whether for good or ill, seemed sent as my guiding star. He was the captain of a whaling vessel; though the encounter arose not on his own ship—she being at the time in New Bedford harbor—but on one of the New York wharves, or "piers," as they are called. I had been on board a barque that was about to set sail for the West Indies, and had offered myself, to meet refusal, as many times before. Back upon the wooden wharf, I was sauntering along in greater dejection than ever, when I heard a voice hailing me from behind:

"Ahoi, there, youngster! Bring to, and let's have a talk with you."

Turning—as the words were evidently addressed to myself—in the speaker I recognized a man whom I had noticed on the barque's quarter-deck in conversation with her captain. Coming quickly up with me, he said in continuation:

"You want to go to sea, don't you, little 'un?" Then, without giving me time to reply, he went on: "You needn't answer; I know you do. Well, how'd ye like to take a trip along with me? You look a genteelish lad; but that don't matter. There's more than one of your sort in the for'e'sle of the Flying Cloud. You'll be safe enough there, and snug too. It's rough work at times, but I suppose you're not particular. You won't be, if you've got the stuff in you for a sailor; and, from the cut of your jib and the set of your stu'n'sils, strikes me you have. So, then, what say you to becoming a blubber-hunter?"

During this odd rambling speech, which I but half comprehended, he kept changing a cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other, plucking it out and putting it back again, all the while chewing rather than smoking it. Indeed, that was he doing, as the end of the cigar—a long regalia—was crushed and flattened for an inch or two outside his lips. This eccentric action, with something else strange in his behavior, led me to suspect he might not be altogether right in the top story; or, if so, that he was making game of me. His closing question made me sure of it; for I had no more idea of what was meant by "a blubber-hunter" than the man in the moon.

"I say, no," was my rejoinder, somewhat sharp and short, for I was rather irritated by his free-and-easy fashion. "Anything but a blubber-hunter," I added, with scornful emphasis.

I was turning to continue my walk, when, chancing to give another glance up at the man's face, I observed an expression upon it which changed my opinion of him. He was a man in the prime of life, forty or forty-five, with a ruddy, sunburnt complexion, and features aught but sinister. Instead, inclined to joviality, with a dash of comic in them; this heightened by the mode in which he held his cigar. It was stuck between his teeth at an acute angle with the plane of his face, but always changing position, the ignited end now above the bridge of his nose, anon below the point of his chin. On hearing my curt and somewhat ill-natured reply, he plucked it clean out of his mouth; then, making deliberate survey of me from head to foot, he drawled out:

"Anything but a blubber-hunter! Well, you're a kewrie, I must say. Wantin' to go to sea—mad, keen, to ship in any capacity—as I've heerd you

admit but a minute ago; and yet scornin' to become a whalesman! Let me tell you, young 'un, you might do worse; and, with all your grand airs, there are some of my lads on board the Flying Cloud who have reason to think themselves quite as big bugs as yourself."

He had turned shoulder, and was hastening on past me, when I came to comprehend the mistake I had made. In fact, as soon as he had taken the cigar from between his teeth, and his lips, hitherto kept awry by it, became straightened to their natural position, his countenance no longer betokened either imbecility or fun-making. On the contrary, it expressed seriousness and decision.

"Stay, sir!" I said, calling after him, in tone of repentance and appeal, for I felt that I owed it him. "I see that I've committed a mistake, and acknowledge it. It was all of my not knowing what you meant by a blubber-hunter. Had I known it was a whalesman, I should have said yes; been but too glad to say it."

"Well, little 'un," he rejoined, once more coming to a stop, "I thought there was some twist in our understandin' of one another. So I'll put the question to you once more, leaving out the dubious words: Do you want to be one of the fraternity of whalesmen?"

"Nothing would more delight me, sir. I'd rather be that than anything else."

I spoke but the truth—the honest truth. For at the time the whaling business—at least in the United States—was at its best, men making fortunes by it. I cared not for this. What most concerned me was the romance attached to it—the episodes of adventure, peril, and hair-breadth escape—narratives of which were constantly, almost daily, appearing in the newspapers. It was just the life I had been longing for, and here at length, was an opportunity to enter upon it.

Need I say that I embraced it? You may be very sure I did; and before leaving the spot closed with the proposal made me by the man who had so opportunely introduced himself.

"Meet me to-morrow," he said, at parting, "and I'll give you full directions. You'll find me at the Ship and Anchor Hotel, close to Peck slip. Inquire for Captain Drinkwater, of the Flying Cloud. But you needn't name the vessel, as she's in New Bedford. Ten o'clock, sharp, my lad. Be there to a minute, if you want to be a blubber-hunter."

Saying which, he pitched the cigar back into his mouth, gave it another "scrunch" between his teeth, and left me alone upon the pier.

CHAPTER III.

THE FLYING CLOUD.

NEXT morning, I need hardly tell you, I was punctual to my appointment at the Ship and Anchor Hotel.

My second interview with Captain Drinkwater ended in my being formally engaged as an apprentice to the craft of the whalesman, with instructions where to find his ship, and orders to report myself on board forthwith.

In twenty-four hours after I was in New Bedford, on the Flying Cloud; and in less than a week from that time we were well out into the Atlantic, heading down for the Horn. Our destination was the Pacific, at that time the great cruising ground of whalers, as indeed it still is.

Of course I found life in the forecastle of a whaling ship something very different from what I had been accustomed to; and the company not quite as refined as I might have wished it. They numbered between forty and fifty, mostly American-born, though there were some of all countries and nations. A motley assemblage, and at first seeming a rough one. But I had shipped for adventure, not for society's sake, and was prepared for certain disagreeables. Indeed, I was rather pleasantly surprised, to find things better than I had anticipated; and after a day or two's intercourse with the crew of the Flying Cloud I discovered that their roughness was more apparent than real, having a good deal to do with "sprees" ashore, from the effects of which it took them some time to recover. Then their true character came out; and, though there certainly were bad fellows among them, the good ones predominated by a large majority.

A certain degree of self-respect, with a sense of decency, characterized the Flying Cloud's crew; as much, if not more than that of any other ship I have ever been aboard of, and their discipline was quite equal to that of most men-of-war. It is often so with American whaling vessels; a chief reason, as I believe, being that on these young men of the better classes not unfrequently seek employment, less for the sake of gain than the love of adventure, as I had myself.

Another cause may be assigned for this tone of respectability among American whalesmen. Every one on board a whaling ship—be it boy or man—is in a way part owner of her; or, at all events, a prospective sharer in the profits of the adventure; and, knowing himself such, is not likely to behave in a manner that may frustrate the end in view. Often a lucky cruise, lasting for little over a year—or it may be under—sees each return home with enough money made, hard earned though it may have been, to start him in some other calling—if the whalesman's life has not proved to his liking.

On the Flying Cloud there were several land-lubbers; that is, youngsters, like myself, who had never been to sea before. But, with that quick intuition, which I believe almost peculiar to the American people—pardon me for what may appear a boast—they very soon became expert in the handling of ropes, and picked up all the other knowledge necessary for navigating a ship. So, before we had rounded Cape Horn, the Flying Cloud was

about as well manned a vessel as ever weathered that dangerous headland.

There was a drawback, however, to this capability of her crew. This, our captain, who was not exactly what he should be. Never did a man bear a name less in keeping with his nature than Captain Drinkwater. If he had been called Captain Drinkrum it would have been more appropriate to his habits.

It was fortunate for us that there was another officer on board of an altogether different disposition, with habits of the very opposite kind. This the first mate, by name Elijah Coffin; or, in the familiarity peculiar to the crews of whaling ships, more generally called, "Lige Coffin"—a New Englander by birth, and whalesman to the backbone, as his surname indicates. For Fenimore Cooper, in bestowing on the stalwart hero of his romance the name of "Long Tom Coffin," drew the appellation from real life. All around the Massachusetts shore, from New Bedford to Boston, there is not a sea-coast village without its family of Coffins, and a whaling vessel going to sea from this part of the world with no man named Coffin among her crew would be something exceptional.

The Flying Cloud was not thus deficient, instead, *en règle*. And if Lige Coffin was not so noted as his namesake of the novel, he was equally as good a seaman; none more skilled ever treading the deck of ship. He had his idiosyncrasies, too, as our captain, but luckily leaning the opposite way. Drink he held in abhorrence; rashness repudiated; sobriety, taciturnity and caution being his three chief characteristics.

Not the only ones, however, as we all knew. More than once, before weathering the Horn, his courage had been tested, and stood the test; as again several times during our cruise in the Pacific. It was my particular fate, however, to see it tried in a way, and under circumstances of a very peculiar and perilous kind—such as I should not care to encounter again. In fact he and I were in that position it was die one or the other—at least, we thought so at the time.

CHAPTER IV.

A CHRISTMAS MORNING IN MID-OCEAN.

We had spent several months in the South Pacific, cruising about after *cachalot*, this whale being the sort which there most abounds, and for the capture of which the Flying Cloud had been especially fitted out. It was before the discovery of petroleum, when sperm oil, or, more properly, spermaceti, commanded such prices as to make the capture of this species more profitable than any other.

We had chanced upon what my shipmates called a "lucky lay," 200 leagues off the coast of Chili, where almost every day we sighted *cachalot*, and not many passed without our making capture of one.

But just in proportion to our success, our skipper's fondness for drink more than ever declared itself; frequently to the discomfort of the crew. Water he seemed to abhor, or, at all events, cared so little about that he rarely drank it, or only in his coffee. His idea of a properly-mixed grog was that called coxswain's—"a pint of rum with half a pint of that same."

And yet he was not a bad man in his way, or of a wicked disposition—anything but that. Instead, when sober, a kindly creature, and generous to a fault. Rashness was his besetting sin, next to his fondness for Santa Cruz rum; this being his favorite tipple. And when under its influence his rashness often degenerated into recklessness, of a very dangerous kind to his ship and crew, as well as to himself.

One of his most cherished ideas was, that the Flying Cloud was the fastest ship that ever carried canvas, and, moreover, could herself carry any amount of it, no matter what the wind. In point of fact she was a fast-sailing vessel; though I have been upon others that could show stern to her on any tack. Captain Drinkwater did not believe there was one that could do this, and the man who should have said so in his hearing need never expect to be friends with him after. If, when under the influence of drink, though only a little excited with it, he chanced to see a ship standing on the same tack as himself, or even bearing in a different direction, no matter what his own course at the time or the business he was about, he would order all sail out, helm up or down, as the case might be, and engage the other vessel in a race.

I remember once, when we were chasing a sperm whale, and about to lower boats, a rival whalesman appeared in sight, running along to our leeward, and also in chase of a whale. It was larger than the one we were after, being the bull, while ours was the cow.

"By Geehosofat!" cried Captain Drinkwater, using one of his favorite exclamations, as the telescope went up to his eye. "If I'm not mistaken, that's the Saucy Sarah. It is, by thunder! Let's 'bout ship, boys, and show old Bostock the way to pitch a harpoon into a whale."

And about the ship was put; for, drunk or sober, Captain Drinkwater was not a man to be disobeyed. It is but giving him his due to say, that he commanded his vessel and her crew, whether for good or ill, no one daring to dispute his authority. On this occasion his luck lay on the wrong side, and the Flying Cloud lost something in her reputation as a fast sailer. For before we could come up with the Saucy Sarah the latter had overtaken the bull whale, lowered boats, harpooned and hooked onto it. As we surged alongside Bostock, her captain, standing upon the taffrail, trumpet to his lips, cried out:

"Too late this time, Drinkwater—too late! If I'd known you were astern, I'd have thrown you a harpoon and taken the Cloud in tow. You'd better put back to that cow you were crawling after. But you

must sail quicker than you're doing to catch up with her!"

During all the time of my being aboard the Flying Cloud I never saw her captain's face so expressive of chagrin. It showed the very maximum of it. As we put about to return to the whale we had forsaken for such slight cause, and which ultimately escaped us—indeed, we never set eyes on it again—he called for more rum, his favorite Santa Cruz, and went on swallowing glass after glass till carried helpless to his state-room.

For all, our success was such, that when Christmas came round we had got on board nearly as much oil as our craft could carry, and wanted only another hundred barrels or so to complete the cargo. Of course this put us all in the best of spirits, and we were determined that Christmas Day on the Flying Cloud should be one of the merriest ever spent in a ship.

Captain and crew being, as already stated, all partners in the speculation, were alike jubilant over the successful issue; and though out at sea, 200 leagues from land and far away from home, the thought of Christmas, with its mystic rites, was as much present to us as if we were about to spend it, each under his own parental roof-tree, or by the fireside of a friend. But as we could not be there, we made up our minds that the day should be observed with all due solemnity, and as much cheer as could be extracted from the storerooms of a whaler. As I learned from some of my shipmates such had been the custom of the Flying Cloud—for this was not her first whaling voyage—whether cruising among the icebergs of the Arctic Ocean, or on the blue billows of the South Sea.

On this occasion, however, there was something more than the wonted incitement to hilarity. Her crew were like sportsmen who have had a good day, and are starting back home with a heavy game-bag. And so near to going home! That also added to our anticipated pleasure, recalling the memories of many other Christmas days spent among sisters, sweet cousins, and kinsfolk; and if there was a drawback now, it was because these were not with us, or, rather we with them.

Still we might be merry enough without them, and to insure this every available resource found upon the Flying Cloud was summoned into contribution. If we were not to have the presence of women, our generous-hearted skipper promised plenty of wine, or, what was more to the taste of the forecastle, rum and whisky, right cheerfully placing all the cabin stores at our disposal; while the cook—an accomplished *chef* of the sea specialty, with a cable skin—promised to produce such a spread as had never been set before a crew of voracious whalers.

There was some "chaff" about the absence of turkey and the orthodox Christmas goose, which was equally unattainable. Some talk, too, of our having a substitute, by shooting down one of the gulls, gannets, or noddies seen flying around the ship. Possibly had an albatross, or other big sea bird, ventured just then within shot-gun range, it might have graced the festive board of the Flying Cloud's forecastle for that Christmas Day's dinner.

Apart from the desirable dishes which could not be obtained, however, there was no lack of material for others not disdainable. The ship being provisioned for a longer cruise than we would now be called upon to make, her stores were far from being exhausted; plenty of beef, "prime mess," remaining, with pork, pickles and preserves. Flour, too, of first quality, with raisins and dried currants, quaintly called plums, to make the pudding, and brandy, promised by the captain, to burn "blue blazes" around it. We were to have soup and fish, with the famed "fish-chowder," some albocores we had caught giving opportunity for indulging in this last—a dish in the concoction of which our able cook was celebrated. To a crew that had been living for six months on "salt junk," varied occasionally with "scouse" and "duff," the promised *menu* appeared epicurean.

Early on Christmas morning the decks were cleared, far as circumstances permitted; then washed and holystoned like those of a ship-of-war. This done, every man made his toilette, all appearing in "Sunday go-ashores," the best their sea-chests could produce. Some were got up with as much care and elegance as if a ball were about to come off on board, with Queen Emma, of the Sandwich Islands, or Pomare, of Otaheite, expected to be present, and shake a foot in the dancing.

For all, there was one who remained backward, and seemed to decline entering into the spirit of the hour; the Flying Cloud's first officer, Elijah Coffin. On this merry Christmas morn, when everybody else was full of joyous glee, flinging jests at one another, and loudly laughing, on the countenance of Lige Coffin sat a cloud even darker and gloomier than was its wont, and quite in keeping with the funereal character of his name. Still, no one took any notice of it. He had never borne part in any game or sport indulged in by the crew; and the ceremony now to come off, so joyous and festive, was not at all to his liking. Had the intention been to hold a prayer meeting, he would have been prominent in promoting it, and the man to act as its leader. Still, despite his cold, unlovable disposition, Lige Coffin was not disliked by the Flying Cloud's crew, far less was he despised by them. All knew him to be a good man and able seaman, above all, as skilled a whalesman as ever harpooned. And as an officer, if unsocial, he was not tyrannical. Therefore, though none of us could "cotton" to him, there was no one who either hated, or held him in contempt. It would have pleased many on that particular day to see him cheerful with the rest; though few took note of the shadow which sat upon his brow; and those who did possibly put it down

to the eccentricity of his character; his habit being, or seeming, to feel sad while others were rejoicing.

Accustomed as we were to his habitual solemnity, it little affected us; on this merry morning less than ever, when the lines of duty were relaxed, and his authority as our officer for the time in abeyance.

CHAPTER V.

"SHE BLOWS!"

The sun had crossed the meridian and savory odors, oozing out of the cook's galley admonished us that ere long dinner would be dished. We were in the full springtide of pleasurable anticipation, when a hail from aloft brought a change over the countenance of every one. It was the well-known shout, "She blows!"

I think I may safely assert, that never was this cry heard upon a whaler's deck with less feeling of joyfulness; more than one face actually showing sorrow at it. For to go whale-chasing just then would be to abandon all the expected pleasure of the festivities, to say nothing of the dinner getting spoiled. But Captain Drinkwater was not the man to let such a chance escape him. If he had been, his first officer was sure to insist upon taking advantage of it. Indeed, the "Blows" had scarce ceased to reverberate through the ship's rigging, when a voice, in long-drawn, lugubrious cadence, was heard inquiring, "Whereaway?" It came from Lige Coffin, just then seen hastening across the quarter-deck.

"Larb'rd bow," responded the man on the mast-head. "There, again—blows!"

The Flying Cloud's crew would not have been whalesmen to remain longer calm; and in ten seconds' time all hands were crowding along the larboard side, and looking off over the ocean. Not so far off, either; for the spray, which betrayed the breathing of *leviathan* at this his second exhalation, was scarce three cables' length from the ship. From the spout being a single instead of double jet, we could tell the whale to be a *cachalot*; though there were other peculiarities which enabled us to make out its species, as the blunt, square head, the protuberant hunch on the neck, and the elongated ridge declining toward the tail. An old *bull*, to, piebald and gray-headed—one of the largest, any of us had ever seen.

"By Geehosefat! a hundred-barreler!" exclaimed the captain, who by this had got upon the forward deck. "Boys!" he continued, "he's a beauty, isn't he? He'll just complete our cargo, if we get the iron into him. See! he's going slow as a plow-ox; spouting, and never once sounding, just as to say, 'Follow me, if you dare!' Let's down boats and after him!"

At any other time our captain would have commanded "down boats," instead of thus half entreating it. But he saw how reluctant his crew were to go in chase of a whale which had so inopportune shown itself. The delectable fragrance, carried forward from the cook's galley, had a hold upon them stronger than any cetaceous attraction. Besides, every one was in his go-ashore toggery, and to start for work, under the circumstances, was anything but to their liking.

Had the *cachalot* been a cow, or one of ordinary size, it is likely the temptation to chase it would have been even less, and the order, if not actually resisted, obeyed with little alacrity. But an old *bull*, to all appearances a "hundred-barreler," as the captain had said, that was another affair. Sperm oil was then selling at sixty dollars the barrel, with "case" and "junk" high-priced in proportion. This meant a pot of money, and the crew, being a joint-stock company, made all the difference. Besides, the whale was still keeping company with our barque, bowing along in parallel course with her, right abeam, as if really bidding us defiance! Where was the whalesman who could stand that?

"We must have him aboard, boys!" again cried out the captain. "Just the dish to crown our Christmas-dinner, and he'll stand for both goose and turkey. Let's postpone it, then, till we've struck him, and I'll draw double rations of the best Santa Cruz."

It no longer needed this promise to encourage the Flying Cloud's crew, or excite them to the chase. The saucy behavior of the *cachalot* had already done this, provoking them to a man. So that to the captain's speeches there was a prompt unanimous response.

"All right; we're ready!"

"Out boats, then, and on to him! A hundred dollars to the first boat that makes fast!"

With that alertness which distinguishes the crew of a whaling vessel, the boats were soon lowered, manned, and in full chase of the whale.

I chanced to be one of the larboard boat's crew, under command of the first mate, who always heads this boat. There were three other rowers, besides myself, with the boat-steerer—in short, the usual complement of six. And, spurred on by the hope and prospect of obtaining a sixth share in that hundred dollars, I need hardly say that every one of us worked our oar with a will.

We rowers in the first mate's boat were all of us strong young fellows, and, besides, had the most skillful steerer of the Flying Cloud's crew. The result was, that we were up to the whale before either of the other two boats had got within a hundred yards of it. In another second our steerer, rising to his feet and balancing himself firm, with the harpoon poised on high, hurled it barb-deep into the *cachalot*, just behind the neck bunch.

We saw that we were "fast;" had won the hundred; and sent up a cheer of triumph, which must have been rather tantalizing to the crews of the waist and starboard boats.

But only we youngsters who handled the oars declared our exultation in this noisy fashion. The first

mate and steerer, older and of better experience, took no part in it, at least with their voices. That of the former was heard loud enough; but not in idle utterance. Instead, in a tone of command, his countenance showing apprehension, he called out:

"Give way, there—give way!"

In obedience we pulled our best, well knowing why. It was to avoid the swing of the whale's flukes, now lashing the water into foam.

Only for a few minutes did the "bohtailing" continue. Then, to the cry, "There he goes! eyes out!" the huge cetacean started off to windward like a runaway horse dragging upon the bit, and maddened by the spur that had pierced his ribs, still rankling in them.

Out went our line, reeling off the wheel in a whir, till it touched its last fathom, becoming taut with a sudden pluck; after which our boat was carried through the water as if towed in the wake of the fastest steamer!

For a full half-hour did this easy skim to windward continue; till, first the two boats we had beaten, and then the barque herself, sunk nearly out of sight.

Most, if not all of us rowers began to feel alarm, the steerer himself showing it, but not Lige Coffin. To the counsel, timidly spoken, to "Cut loose and let the whale go," he would not listen.

"No-o!" he drawled out, in his strange, singing voice, as if it were the commencement of a hymn; "we can't afford to let him off that way. It mout be a month 'fore we hev sich another chance; an' a month later will make it ugly gettin' round the Horn. He's had the harpoon well into him, and we must give him the lance too. Look! He's not like to tow us many furlong further. Don't ye see, he's blowin' blood?"

This was true enough. On turning our eyes to the old *bull*, we saw that the spray belched up from his spiracle had become of a reddish color, which told that the harpoon had struck him in a vital part, laying open one of the large blood-vessels. Not unfrequently the harpoon-stroke is of itself sufficient to kill a whale, and our boat-steerer believed he had given the death blow to this one.

We were now so certain of securing him, that we thought no more about the boats left behind, nor the barque. From this time all our attention was taken up with the movements of the wounded giant. We could perceive that he swam slower and slower, by the lessened speed of our boat; and at length he came to a stop altogether.

"He lays to at last!" exultingly cried our commander. "Haul line, my hearties! Haul upon him!"

Dropping the oars, we all took hold of the harpoon-line, and commenced hauling on it hand over hand. This soon brought us close up to the whale. Then Lige Coffin, lance in hand, leaning over the boat's bow, began stabbing the huge creature, repeating his well-directed strokes till the spray from its spout-hole rose to fall again like a shower of red rain.

The *cachalot* made a last attempt to "sound." But, weakened with the loss of blood which the harpoon blade had let out, it could but feebly play its flukes, and went only a few feet under. Then, buoying back to the surface, it lay dead as a water-soaked log; the only motion observable being that caused by the undulation of the sea, due to the whipping of its flukes in the final struggle between life and death—in whalesman's phrase, the "flurry."

CHAPTER VI.

A FLING BY FLUKES.

THE *cachalot* now surely dead, it was necessary we should go back for the other boats, to help us tow it to the barque, or else bring the barque to the whale. In either case it was also as much matter of necessity to mark the place, so that we might find it again. This was done by the boat-steerer leaping out on the whale's body, and scrambling up to its bump—in which he stuck one of our flag-signals. Then, cutting out the harpoon, and handing it back into the boat, the lines were reeled up, and we were preparing to row off, when again came the cry:

"She blows!"

It was the steerer himself who shouted, still standing up in the stern. He had sighted another *cachalot*.

"Whereaway?" demanded the mate.

"Port bow—two points. A'most dead ahead, and bearin' right down on us."

The announcement set us all into a state of fresh excitement, and no wonder. We had settled with one whale, and here was the chance of striking another. What a triumph if we returned to report a pair killed! That would surely complete the ship's cargo! Glory and gain crowding upon us together. A *cachalot*, too; for we all now had our eyes upon it, and saw it was a single spouter.

"Ship oars and lay to!" sung out our commander. "Hilloa!" he added, with his eyes turned in the direction of the live whale, "there's a pair of them! Ah! I see—it's a cow with her calf! Coming straight this way, too! Look alive, Bill, and let the sucker have it first."

This to the boat-steerer, whose name was Bill, and who now had hold of the harpoon. The reason of his being directed first to use it on the calf, was because the latter, once killed, the cow would stay by it, and give us an opportunity to strike her also. The steerer knew this, as we all did, and so prepared to pitch the iron into the youngster first.

In a few seconds more the cow came surging along, with the miniature semblance of herself swimming alongside, just by the end of her larboard fin. Luckily our boat was upon that side, and in an instant after the barbed weapon was launched and buried in the body of the calf, which at the stroke turned over, and lay lifeless on the water.

Just as we anticipated, the mother did not attempt to make away, but at once came to, apparently in a state of bewilderment. Before she could recover from it, the mate had flung the spare harpoon, crying out, as he saw it sink deep into her blubber:

"Fast!"

But instead of the cow staying by the dead calf, as we expected, she "breached" clear out of the water, and then coming down with a terrific splash, ran "head out," taking the line along with her. The hemp was soon drawn taut, hard as a rod of iron, and away we went for a second drag, this time our boat seeming to glide through the water with greater velocity than ever.

We were soon out of sight of both the dead calf and bull; even the signal flag sinking by inches at a time. And before the cow came to a stop—which she at length condescended to do—the bit of bunting had quite disappeared from our view!

Soon as she was at rest, we commenced hauling line, though we made approach with more caution than when closing in upon the bull. All knew that the danger was greater, a cow *cachalot* deprived of her calf being the ugliest kind of customer to have dealings with.

We drew up to her, however, safe enough; the huge creature as we approached lying still and motionless, without so much as a tremor. She had squirted such a quantity of blood from her spout hole, we took it she must be dead.

Never were men more mistaken. Just as we had got within lancing distance, we noticed a muscular contraction in the convex ridge of the cetacean's back, and quick following the tail went suddenly upward.

"There goes flukes!" shouted the steerer. "She's going to sound—look out for squalls!"

As he spoke, the cow elevated her broad steering gear high in air, and with her body for a moment poised perpendicularly, as if standing on her head, she dropped down into the water, at once disappearing from our sight.

Knowing what this meant, and that there was danger still, to the command, "Oars all!" we commenced pulling off, as for very life.

And for life it was, but alas! also too late. In an instant after the boat received a shock, followed by a continuous crashing; in the midst of which I felt as if I were falling from a scaffold, only with the difference that I believed myself going up instead of down! But just as I had made this reflection the order was reversed: and my next sensation was a plunge into water, so deep that the immersion continued until I was well-nigh choked.

I must have been hurled high up into the air, judging by the depth of my descent under the water; for, as I ceased sinking, and began to buoy up again, all was darkness around me.

Once more back to the surface; after rubbing the brine out of my eyes, I looked abroad for the boat. It was not in sight! And its crew, my late companions, where were they? Not one of them to be seen—no boat, no human being, no body! Even the *cachalot* cow, that "fluked" us, had not returned from her soundings, if she ever would. I was alone, or seemed so, on the wayless water!

It was not waveless, however, now; though lately it had been. A breeze had sprung up, and was fast freshening. Already a curl was over the surface, which here and there showed crested flakes of foam beginning to clout upward. Possibly but for this I might have seen something of the boat's wreck—for I felt sure it must have been smashed—or of my comrades, who, as myself, had been precipitated into the sea. I knew they could all swim, and should still be near, as I buffeting with the billows.

I called aloud. No answer. A large sea-bird, booby or albatross, swooping overhead, croaked the only response.

During all this time I was not lying low on the water, but every now and then, with head raised high as I could hold it. Though born and brought up, as I have told you, in the backwoods, it was on the banks of a broad, deep river, and in that I had bathed often enough to make me a good swimmer. Without boasting, I may say that I am one of the best, and was, even when a boy. So with full reliance upon my powers in this respect, I took things more coolly than I otherwise might have done, knowing that if there was any fragment of the boat drifting about, I could easily reach it.

Nor had I as yet lost all hope of being able to swim back to the ship, if I should not sooner meet one of the other boats. Both had been seen rowing on toward us after we lanced the bull *cachalot*. This hope for a time sustained me, and after two or three turns round the place where we had been "fluked," seeing nothing there, I struck out in the direction in which, as I supposed, the ship lay.

It was not long before I awoke from my delusion. For now, swimming straight forward, I found time to reflect, my reflections admonishing me how much I was mistaken in the idea that I could swim back to the ship. I now remembered that long before we had killed the bull *cachalot* the other boats were out of sight, and on the tow-line after the cow we had been carried still further away from them. Good swimmer as I was, I now too well knew that the Flying Cloud must be too far off for me to reach her, even though a star in the sky, or a light aloft on her main truck, showed me the direction. The sun had gone down, and the twilight beginning to darken over the sea, made me think of stars and ships' lanterns.

Continuing to reflect with still greater precision, I remembered that when parting from the bull whale we could just see about half a yard of the barque's main royal mast-head, which meant a distance of at least six nautical miles; added to which, the rapid rush of the cow must have taken us nearly twice as far off. A swim of twelve miles! Enough to make

me despair of ever reaching the ship, even with a boat rowed alongside.

But much more and sooner where there was no boat; and despair I at length felt, or something close akin to it.

A last effort at standing erect, one more look around, a keen interrogation of the waves with their now whitened crests—nothing seen but these—and I sunk back upon the surface of the water, little caring whether I stayed there or went below to the bottom of the sea.

CHAPTER VII.

HANDS OFF!

For some time I lay bitterly, despairingly, upon the waves, making just effort sufficient to keep me afloat. Once or twice I even thought of suspending the stroke and letting myself go to the bottom. Ay, more, I came nigh hastening the death I supposed I should have to meet anyhow, by ducking my head and making a plunge below. For the suspense was terrible, and now that drowning seemed a dead certainty, the thought of it was unendurable. No one could call it suicide, or, if so, who could blame or hold me sinfully culpable under the circumstances? But that just then I indulged in no such moral or metaphysical speculations, I need not tell you. At the moment all my thoughts were of home, of my sisters and brothers; above all, of my mother. And never did I more vividly recall the arguments she had urged against my going to sea, with the reproaches she would shower on me for having disobeyed her. Oh! that I had listened to her words of warning! I could comprehend their wisdom now.

How long I remained in this oddly reflective mood I could never tell. During its continuance I was as one in a dream, and the movement that kept me from sinking was made without any act of volition. But I well remember, too well, what startled me from this trance of swimming somnambulism. It was the body of a man, dead, and nearly cut in twain by a broad blade wound, traversing straight across his back! A wave rolled it up right in front of me, and as it was carried past by the next surge, with the face fair toward me, I recognized it as that of Bill, the boat-steerer. Horrified at the ghastly spectacle, I turned my back upon it, and was striking off to escape from such companionship, when another body came before my eyes. This one, however, not dead, nor lying along the wave, but erect, or at least the upper half of it—for it was waist-deep in the water, as I could see, supported by something. Just then it rose over the combing of a swell, showing the thing that buoyed it to be a piece of broken timber. But I was now near enough to identify it as part of our boat, which the whale had shattered to pieces; I saw, moreover, that the man upon it was Lige Coffin. He was seated on its outside, a whale-lance in his hands, the same with which he had been about to strike the cow *cachalot* when she sounded. This he was using as a paddle; for it was not a lance of the ordinary kind, but an old-fashioned, broad-bladed weapon which chanced to be in the boat. I could not restrain a shout of joy, and, with all my remaining strength, swam straight toward him. "Saved!" I thought, or at least believed there was a better chance of it.

A few seconds sufficed to show me how much I was mistaken. As I drew near to him, I saw that he seemed desirous of shunning me; indeed, soon as his eyes rested upon me, he turned his improvised paddle, and commenced pulling off in the opposite direction. Then came a dark cloud over his brow, which seemed to say, "I don't want your company here."

But I was not in the humor to be denied. To me it was a life and death matter, as to him; and such chance as there was for life I could not let pass lightly. So, increasing the strength and rapidity of my stroke, I swam on.

With his unwieldy craft and ill-conditioned rowing-gear, he made but poor way; and I easily gained upon him. Soon as he saw this he ceased using the lance as an oar, and, plucking it out of the water, he held the weapon poised over his head, evidently intending to employ it for a very different purpose. Nor did he make any secret of his intentions; instead, confessing them plainly and point blank.

"Don't come any nearer!" he said, in his hollow, sepulchral voice. "If you do, it'll be your death. As you value your life, don't come near me!"

There was no mistaking what he meant. The look in his deep-sunken eyes, the tone of his voice, the lance held threateningly aloft, all spoke of a determination to thrust me with it if I went within reach of him. But there was something besides, equally and even more convincing of what he would do. The waves, in their tortuous and capricious whirling, or it might be changing of my own course, had brought back to me, or me to it, the body of the boat-steerer. A surge swept between me and the man who was wielding the whale-spear. As the corpse caught his eye, he cried out, pointing to the great gash still exuding blood:

"You see that? 'Twas all his own doing. He wanted to take a seat beside me; and as this bit of timber's only enough to keep one afloat, I had to say no. He would insist, and I was forced to—well, I needn't tell you what; you see for yourself. So I warn you again not to come near me."

More from being horrified by the terrible revelation than any fear of the implied threat, I ceased swimming toward him, and for a time lay afloat in the water. But, as if to horrify me still further, the mutilated corpse stopped too, and, with a *wee*-like persistence, came bobbing around me.

To get clear of it I again struck out, more by chance than design, in the track of Lige Coffin. And I continued to follow him, though I cannot tell why, for I had no hope of his doing aught to assist me. Clearly he could not, without further imperiling

himself. Besides, I could still see upon his countenance the same dark cloud, and in his cold, rigid features, with the closely-compressed lips, the same determination to kill me if I came near him.

Notwithstanding all this, I swam on after, easily keeping up, but careful not to go within reach of that ugly weapon he had so late wielded with such fatal effect.

CHAPTER VIII.

REMEMBER BILL.

For ten minutes or more I continued to swim after Lige Coffin on his fragment of plank. During all this time we maintained our relative positions, about six fathoms of sea between us; he paddling ahead, I with extended arms beating the waves behind, but with no greatly needed effort. Instead, so little had I to do, I began to fancy myself being towed by him, and it might have appeared so to a spectator regarding us from a distance.

Silence all the while; not a word exchanged between us, and on his face still the same cold, unrelenting look.

He continued to watch me with fixed glance, as if he would be but too glad to see me falter and fall behind. But I followed on, with full reliance in my strength and swimming powers, knowing I could keep up with him ever so long, and yet scarce knowing why I should. He could kill me, and surely would, as the expression in his eye showed, if I attempted to take seat beside him on that frail support. Notwithstanding my being certain of this, I kept on, and close to the blade of his lance, as if some magnetic force in the iron itself drew me up to it. More like it was a moral force—something of that fascination exerted by the serpent over the bird—backed by another instinct impelling me; the thought that I must die, with the wish to do so in the companionship of a fellow-creature. It awed, horrified me to think of dropping behind and dying alone, becoming engulfed in the wild waves that surged around, no one to listen to my last words nor speak the solemn farewell. I should only hear the cries of ravenous birds—for the sea has its vultures as well as the land—some of which were already sounding in my ears, as if they knew I must surely sink below the surface, soon to come back to it and give them a banquet!

The horror I felt was fast becoming unendurable. I should not, because I could not, have borne it much longer; and in all likelihood one of two things would there and then have resulted; either my voluntarily suspending my now feeble stroke and letting myself sink to the bottom of the sea, or putting fresh vigor into it, and, regardless of the threatening whale-spear, make a spurt forward to contest possession of the plank.

Fortunately it came not to this; but why it did not was no credit to me; instead to the man who in that trying moment I deemed my direst enemy. While toiling wearily through the waves, almost as hopelessly for him as for myself, our eyes often seeking one another in mutual interrogation, I fancied I at length saw in his something like an expression of pity. I knew he was not a man of a cruel or brutal nature—anything but this—and that inhumanity had naught to do with his behavior now. He was but obeying the dictates and instincts of Nature's first law—taking care of himself; therefore, I could scarce blame him, and certainly would not under ordinary circumstances. But then, with my own life at stake, I was less disposed to be charitable; till at length his look seemed to say:

"Well, you've worked hard for it, young fellow; and I'm sorry I can't assist you. But, as you see, this thing won't carry two, and you can't expect me to sacrifice myself."

Not a word of this said he, though I could almost believe he did, and that I heard it. Hence my rejoinder:

"I know it won't carry two; but can you see nothing else that would help me? You are higher in the water than I. Look around, for Heaven's sake! There may be something in sight; an oar, or another fragment of the boat."

He acceded to my request, and commenced scanning the sea. I watched his every glance, and the expression upon his features, as one who in the words of the clairvoyant expects to be "told his future."

"Nothing," he announced, after an interval, his eyes once more turning toward me in an expression of dull disappointment.

"Make sure!" I said, in the urgency of desperation. "Have you looked the sky line all round? There's the ship herself, and the signal-flag we left on the dead whale; one or other may be in sight, and have escaped you."

"I wish one of them was in sight," he responded, in a hopeless tone. "It's just for one or t'other I've been all along looking on my own account. Lord have mercy upon us, there's neither to be seen!"

Once more my heart sunk within me, and I swam despondingly as ever. But still keeping close to him; as before following in his wake, and with my eyes fixed upon his face, though more mechanically than from any hope of his being able to help me.

And now again I saw that he did not seem to like this, possibly having a fear I might in my drowning despair swim up and clutch onto him. I had no thought of doing so, or less than ever. His behavior had disarmed me, for again he had run his eyes around, evidently endeavoring to catch sight of something to which I might cling. He told me he was doing this.

All at once I observed him make a start, and look off over the sea with eager, steady gaze.

"What is it?" I asked, without waiting for him to declare himself.

"I thought I see'd somethin' out yonder—somethin' as looked like an oar."

"Where? Point out the exact direction!"

"Out thar to the right—your larboard. Hadn't you better swim a bit that way and see?"

I did not wait for more, but turning, struck out and swam off, still guided by his directions called after me.

Sure enough there was a something upon the water, and a good way off. But I kept on till close enough to determine what it was. No boat's oar, but a strip of brown seaweed, a long stalk of drifting kelp, which the next surge of the swell brought up against my breast, almost infolding me in its dangerous embrace. As it clung around me, so far from proving a support, it came nigh holding me fast, till I should sink through sheer exhaustion.

At length getting released from it, I recommended swimming after the man who had directed me toward the treacherous waif. But now in an altered frame of mind—in short, mad, angry at him. He had played me a trick, as I supposed, in saying he believed the floating object to be an oar. He knew it was but a string of seaweed. All a *ruse* to get rid of me. So thought I, and acting as the sinister thought dictated, I made straight toward him, at length determined on a struggle for mastery of the bit of broken boat.

Chafed and furious, I reflected not on the result of a such a contest, nor calculated the chances for and against me. I knew the first mate to be a man of great strength, tough, and sinewy. Besides, he had the double advantage of being armed with a formidable weapon, and something to support him while wielding it. I was weaponless, with but my naked hands and arms, both needed to keep me afloat. It might seem rank insanity to think of as-sailing him thus.

But it did not to me then. Though young, but a boy in years, I was a man in strength, and more than most men in suppleness and activity. I had been the *athlete* of my school, the knowledge of which now gave me confidence, urging me on to attack Lige Coffin despite all inequalities. But still more was I impelled by the thought of death by drowning. That might come later, and seemed sure to come; but I would prefer ending life in a quicker way, by a short, desperate struggle, as that I had nigh resolved on.

And what right had he to the fragment of wreck more than myself? Life was sweet to me, as it could be to him. He was older, had seen more of the world, and longer enjoyed it; another reason for his being the one to leave it, not I to be cut off in my early days, before I had entered upon manhood, before having made my peace with my mother. This thought of itself was unbearable. It excited me almost to madness, adding strength to my stroke, till I swam as rapidly as I had ever done in my life.

The result was my soon closing up with my intended adversary. His eyes as I drew near became sharply set upon me, their glance showing that he suspected my intent. But his words were better evidence, along with the gestures accompanying them. Plucking the whale-spear out of the water, and brandishing it aloft over his head, he cried out: "I warn you again not to come near me. If you intend attempting it, make your peace with God. For, sure as I sit here, I'll run you through with this lance. *Remember Bill!*"

CHAPTER IX.

THE RED RAG.

It was neither the threat made by the mate, nor the horrid spectacle which his words called to remembrance, that hindered me from rushing on to what would in all likelihood have been the last act of my life. Instead, a thought of purer origin and more honorable intent, which had suddenly taken possession of me. Had this man, after all, meant to deceive and get rid of me? Or in representing the driftweed to be a boat's oar, was he under the belief of its being so? He may have been, and I might be mistaken. If so, what a crime I was on the eve of committing, or at least attempting! Had I succeeded, and afterward found him innocent, there would have been sin upon my soul, almost amounting to that of murder. For I now recalled a fact, hitherto forgotten or unthought of, that the first mate of the Flying Cloud, as we all knew, though an efficient officer, was but an indifferent swimmer. Deprived of the bit of timber which supported him, he would likely enough go to the sea's bottom in less than sixty seconds' time.

Reflecting thus, my spirit seemed to become suddenly purified, and I resolved to leave Lige Coffin unmolested, if he could only satisfy me about the seaweed.

"You knew that wasn't an oar you sent me after," I said, looking him straight in the face.

"I knew nothing of the kind. I didn't say it was an oar; only that it looked like one and I believed it to be so."

"Are you speaking the truth, Mr. Coffin? On your oath, are you?"

"I am. But I don't ordinarily swear about such things. And why should I now? What reason could I have had for telling an untruth? You don't suppose I have any fear of your pushing me off this thing? Why, youngster, with this weapon in hand you're as much at my mercy as a mouse between the jaws of a cat. I could kill you even now by hurling the spear at your head. But I wouldn't after the way you've acted—not for the world—and I only wish I could lend you a helping hand. Which, as you know very well, I can't, without giving my life for yours. Neither of us may be saved by the frail thing; but certainly we can't both."

After listening to his explanation, had Lige Coffin slipped off the plank and pushed it toward me, telling me to get on, I should have rejected the offer. I had mistaken the character of the man. And now,

better knowing it, I felt as though I could meet my fate with more fortitude and calmer resignation.

It seemed not far off. I had become greatly enfeebled, and could not keep afloat many minutes longer. Once more I bethought myself whether I had not better suspend stroke, and put an end to the agony; for agony it was to feel myself drowning, dying as it were by inches.

I had half-resolved to cut loose from life. It needed but to cease action of my arms. With these only a second at rest I would sink to the bottom of the sea. But to do this would be *suicide*; possibly excusable under the circumstances, but still in a way self-murder, and therefore sinful. For was it certain that God had given me up? It was not—not, not yet.

And no more had man—no more Lige Coffin. For just then his voice again sounded in my ear, this time in a tone of still deeper sympathy, as if more than ever touched by my situation. Perhaps he too was reflecting, as I, of the sin of selfishness he would be held accountable for by leaving me to my fate.

Whatever the motive stirring him, he this time called to me by name, saying:

"Macy! If you'll swear to me that you'll get off this bit of timber, whenever I ask you to do so, I'll let you get on and have a spell of rest. I'm not such a bad swimmer but that I can afford to do that. We may both be lost all the same, but there's just a chance both of us may be saved. The wind's going down again, and we can't be so very far from the dead whale. We may reach that, if we can't the ship; and, if so, it would give us footing till either the barque or her boats come in search of us. Will you swear, as I ask you?"

"I will."

"By all your hopes of heaven?"

I had just enough breath left to gasp out the form of adjuration dictated.

"Enough!" he said, slipping off the bit of boat, and giving it a shove toward me.

I was astride of it the instant after; and, under my lesser weight it rose higher on the water. But for all that, I felt it would not have supported both, and could now better understand why he had refused me a seat beside him. If deeply affected by his generous confidence, I had still further proof of it by his handing me up the whale-lance, saying:

"Take this and paddle straight on, keeping the sun before your face. I've a reason for thinking the ship's out that way."

He needed not fear trusting me with the lance then; I should sooner have thought of burying its blade in my own body, than in his.

After proceeding for some time—I on the plank timing the pace, so as not to become separated from him—we again changed places. And with another interval again; each after a spell of swimming to take a few minutes' rest. Of course, our eyes were not idle; instead, active, especially those of him astride the plank, the more elevated position giving a wider and further view of the sea.

We had spent about an hour in this alternate swimming, and resting, as travelers with but one horse between them do the "ride and tie," when it came to an end; a happy termination; brought about, as I thought then, and still think, by the hand of Providence; a grace of God given to us in return for that we had extended to one another. Surely was it His hand which assisted us both in reward for our own mutual assistance.

It was I who at the moment I speak of had the turn seat on the fragment of boat, with the duty of watch over the waves. And never saw I an object which gave me greater gladness than that speck of red rag, not bigger than a pocket-handkerchief, floating at the top of a thin stick. For I knew it as the signal-flag we had stuck into the carcass of the *cachalot*. Soon as sighting it, with my weakened voice I sent up a shout. But faint though it was, it brought brightness to the face of my companion in peril, who, like myself, was almost in the last throes of feebleness and despair.

I stayed not a moment longer on the plank; but slipping off again surrendered both seat and whale-spear to Lige Coffin.

"Yes!" he joyously exclaimed, soon as getting in an upright position, and sighting the bit of red bunting. "That's our signal, for sartin. And now that's some chance of our gettin' saved. Drunk or sober, Captain Drinkwater ain't the man to let Lige Coffin, who's cruised wi' him, on an' off, for a round dozen o' whalin' voyages, go adrift, without doin' the best he can to hook onto him. Them on the barque know the direction the whale took us off. Besides, the other boats came a bit of the way. They're sure to ba' got back to the ship, and she's sure to come in search of us. Drinkwater'll quarter every inch of this hyar ocean before he thinks o' givin' us up!"

With this our dialogue for the time came to an end, both too intent, the one rowing, the other swimming after, to think of aught else than reaching the red rag.

In ten minutes after we reached it. Coffin plunging his lance deep into the "small" of the dead whale, just above the flukes; by which we were enabled to climb upon its carcass. Soon as there, with firm footing beneath us, we both dropped down, to lie less like men exhausted, than actually dead.

CHAPTER X.

"ALL BUT BILL."

HOWEVER we may have looked lying along the carcass of the *cachalot*, I can tell you how we felt; or, I should rather say *cannot*, since for some time we had no sensations at all. There was an interval of unconsciousness experienced by both of us, complete as if asleep, or really dead.

It passed, however, both awaking from it simultaneously; to find the breath, well-nigh exhausted in the long conflict with wind and wave, back into our bodies. And with this also returned a sense of the reality of our situation; which was not absolute safety, it is true, still something better than before. We had at least rest for the soles of our feet, and were no longer called upon to exert our legs and arms in such a terribly tiresome way.

As already said, having "boarded" the whale between the flukes, which were on a level with the surface of the water, we had laid ourselves down just above the "small." But, on recovering breath, with consciousness, we proceeded on up the "ridge" toward the protuberance of the back, into which the boat-steerer had stuck the signal-staff. You may more easily imagine our surprise than I can describe it, when, as our eyes rose to the level of the neck-hunch, we saw three human bodies reclining against it, recognizing them as our comrades belonging to the wrecked boat!

With ourselves they had formed the complement of its crew, all present now, save the steerer, Bill. Lying side by side, silent and motionless, they, too, seemed either dead or asleep. But they were neither one nor the other—only, as we had been, in the utmost state of exhaustion, from which they had not yet sufficiently recovered to bestir themselves. They had climbed upon the *cachalot* some time before us, having also sighted the signal-flag after a protracted struggle with the waves.

Started by our ejaculations of surprise, all three of them instantly scrambled upon their feet, and we met in mutual congratulation, each party supposing the experience of the other as being somewhat similar to its own. There was a difference, however, in the questions exchanged, one of the three saying, in a solemn tone of voice:

"We're all here but Bill. I wonder what's become of him. Have you seen anything of him?"

It was not my place to make answer; besides, the question was more directly addressed to our officer. As I looked up into his face I saw that his eye was bent upon me, in a glance which seemed to say, "Keep that secret."

"I guess Bill's gone under," he rejoins, evasively, "and we two would have done the same, but for a bit of the broken boat that's been keepin' us afloat. But how did the rest of you get here? Tell us that!" The question was somewhat impressively put, by way of abstracting the thoughts of his old messmates from the missing boat-steerer.

Their story was soon told; having less of varied incident than ours. They had struck right off from the scene of disaster—all three keeping together—and, more fortunate than the mate and myself, sooner caught sight of the flag waving over the dead whale. Being all of them first-rate swimmers, they were able to reach it, though it tasked their full strength, as they admitted.

The moments of our mutual rejoicing were but brief; despondence returning to all of us, soon as we again began to reflect on our future. For what had we gained by getting back on the whale's body? After all, but a temporary footing—a rest, that was only as respite to one condemned to execution, with little hope or prospect of full final pardon. If the barque or her boats came not for us, we must die all the same. And by inches, a slow, lingering death more to be dreaded, because more painful, than by drowning.

What chance was there .. our being succored? This was the question which passed from mouth to mouth, being the thought paramount in our minds. Not much, if any, as common sense told us. Succor could only come from our comrades on the Flying Cloud, for the boats we had parted company with must long since have returned to the ship. We knew our shipmates would do what they could to find us—all that men might. But what could this all amount to? We were in the middle of an ocean, the grandest, widest of the world; for it was the Pacific. An island of twenty square miles in extent would be but a speck upon it. What then the body of a whale half submerged, with five human forms clinging to it like so many barnacles on the copper-sheeted hull of a ship? We had enough experience of the sea to know that a vessel with all on board vigilant—glasses to their eyes—might pass within less than a league's distance without one of them sighting us. It would depend on the state of the weather, and the clearness of the atmosphere. And just then the last was all against us; a haze having drifted over the sea, at the settling down of the short-lived tempest, which had proved but a squall.

Our own eyes looking their keenest—no telescopes to assist them now, that of the mate having gone to the bottom at the breaking up of our boat—we could see nothing of ship or sail; only the sea, with its swell far-rolling around, not blue, as we were wont to behold it, but of a dull, monotonous gray.

And so Christmas night approached, and came upon us; never one less merry to five man in close companionship.

You may suppose we thought how it might have been celebrated by us on board the Flying Cloud, but for the appearing of that huge monster, on whose carcass we were now miserably reclining; that we reflected on the grand dinner with all its delicacies, which, but for it, we should have eaten; on the wines we would have drank, on the smoking of cigars, singing of songs and other pleasant occupations. If supposing so, you would be mistaken. We neither reflected nor speculated on such possible pleasures. Our minds were too much occupied with the danger surrounding, and the dark future before us. And on that Christmas night, as the sun sunk down over the sea, although all five were hungry as wolves, and knew that beneath us was a very mountain of meat, we went to sleep without eating the smallest morsel of it.

CHAPTER XI.

"SEEN AND SAVED."

WE slept soundly withal; at least, I can answer for myself. Sheer fatigue of body called for rest of the mind, and an interval of utter obliviousness. When this ended, and I awoke, I saw that the others were already stirring. The mate had ascended to the highest point upon the whale, where he stood with his hand rested against the signal staff, gazing off over the ocean.

We watched him with eager, anxious eyes; his eager and anxious, too, as he slowly turned his head round and round, examining the sea on all sides.

"I can see nothing," he said, at length. "There's neither boat nor ship in sight."

He stood till the look of despair darkened over his countenance, then came back down to us.

Taking his place, first one, then another, made survey around. Not with much hope, but an involuntary desire each had to satisfy himself. We knew that the first officer of the Flying Cloud was one of the sharpest-sighted men among us, and where he had failed to see boat or ship, there was but little probability we should succeed.

Nor did we. Each came back below, defeated as he had been, announcing it not by words but looks of deepest gloom.

We were even hungrier now than on the night before; still, not enough to make breakfast on that we had forborne supping upon—the blubber. Possibly, if we had been provided with a fire, or the means of making one, we should have been less dainty. Then we could have cooked a whale-steak, palatable enough, or, at all events, eatable on a pinch. But we were not yet up to eating it raw. In all likelihood we should come to that in time, and pretty soon. So reflected we as the hours passed, and the edge of our appetites grew keener.

But we began to suffer from even a worse pain than hunger—the kindred agony, thirst. It had already assailed us on the preceding day, and at night was sufficiently afflicting. All the more that on the Christmas morning, before the whale chase commenced, we had been indulging in double rations of rum, which was, of course, followed by its natural consequence of making us doubly thirsty. On this, the morning after, not one of us on the whale's body but would have given all the share he had in the Flying Cloud's cargo for a pint of the stalest water in her casks. And as the sun rose higher and glared hotter down upon us, for so much of this self-same element we would have consented to yield up anything short of life itself. For our thirst had reached its maximum of pain, as it often does, within twenty-four hours—the time depending on a variety of circumstances. In the present case, nearly all of these were against us: the rum we had drank willfully; the salt water swallowed against our will; the excitement we had been under in long-continued strain, with the exertions accompanying it; and lastly the tropic sun coursing through a cloudless sky over our heads, his fervid beams almost burning our bodies—all these causes combined to produce within us a thirst, terrible in its intensity.

And there was yet another cause I have not named—the calm. The storm of the day before at least kept us cool, and there was enough of breeze throughout the night to fan our fevered brows, had we felt it while asleep. Nothing of that now. The morning after Christmas dawned upon a sea tranquil and smooth, save the swell gradually going down, and which was quite down ere the hour of noon. Then the sun's beams, hot as flames, fell over a surface glistening like molten glass, as if the water itself were on fire.

Something besides, in the calm to make us uncomfortable and unhappy. It had a worse signification still: the barque would be becalmed too, and could not come to us, even though knowing the direction.

Our misery had arrived at its climax as the sun reached meridian. For then our thirst was at the acme of agony. Some tried to get relief by cutting out pieces of the whale's blubber, and holding them to their lips. But to no advantage. The flesh, impregnated with saline particles, seemed but to increase the desire for drink. The attempt in each case ended fruitlessly, as with Tantalus.

We had given up all thought of eating: indeed, hunger itself had fled from us. That appetite we knew we could satisfy at any moment, and to a surfeit. If driven to it, we could have subsisted for days, weeks, maybe months, upon the mass of meat beneath us, till it became carrion. But there was no likelihood of our being forced to such a foul repast. Its repulsiveness would be spared us by death ensuing sooner. Thirst would kill us long before the whale's flesh became putrid. It was killing us now, or soon would—that, or drive us mad.

"Merciful Heaven! when will our sufferings come to an end?"

More than once among us was heard this exclamatory interrogation. And there were curses as well. The sea, the sky, the sun, all came in for their share of denunciation; even the birds—the gulls, whose white wings ever and anon cheated us by their resemblance to a distant sail. Twice had this occurred; each time the tongue that had joyously cried: "Sail ho!" suddenly changing tone to a half-angry, half-sad anathema hurled at some tern, or kittiwake, innocently plying its craft over the calm surface of the sea.

When, for the third time, we heard the hope-giving hail, it scarce gave us hope, after twice listening to that which had deluded us. Even though it was Lige Coffin himself who now shouted "Sail!" and we noted in his eyes, in the whole expression of his face, almost a surety of it, we were still slow to believe. But, looking out ourselves, we saw that a breeze had sprung up, which was a reason for being

less incredulous. So, crowding up around the flagstaff, we all stood on tiptoe and gazed in the direction indicated by our officer, straining our eyes to their utmost.

Sure enough a white speck was observed! no more the back or wing of gull, but canvas well worn and weather-bleached. A sail—a full set spread above a ship, by her rig distinguishable as a barque, our own—the Flying Cloud!

"God be thanked! God be praised!" were the exclamatory phrases, with others of like kind, poured forth as in a volley from five pairs of lips; and, I think I may say, from five grateful hearts.

Our agony long endured was over, the terrible time had passed; for we had very little doubt, seeing the way in which the barque's sails were being handled, that they on board had sighted us, or at least the bit of red bunting on our flagstaff. With their telescopes they could not fail doing so.

Soon we were assured of it, as the Cloud's cutter, alternately rising and falling, with her bowsprit and spread jib sail, was seen standing direct toward us.

No surer were we of delivery, when at a cable's length she lay-to, letting down all three of her biggest boats. One would have been enough to take us aboard. But Captain Drinkwater meant business besides, seeing the dead *cachalot*, and knowing there were a hundred barrels of best spermaceti inclosed in its "case."

We five unfortunates had other fish to fry than troubling our heads further about the whale or its product. We were only too glad to drop into the first boat that "beached" against its huge body, and get rowed to the barque.

Feebly we climbed up the man-ropes, and stood tottering upon the deck; then all went off to the quarter, where the captain was awaiting us.

"Where's Bill?" he asked, after a hasty survey, seeing only five of a boat's crew that had been six.

"Drowned!" answered the first officer, with his eye once more seeking mine, and seeming to say, "Keep that secret."

And I kept it as long as he lived. Indebted to him for my own life, could I do otherwise?

We lost the cow *cachalot*, as well as the boat she had broken, but the old bull proving in reality a "hundred barreler," completed the Flying Cloud's cargo. So soon as the oil was got aboard and stowed away, having no more business in the Pacific for that season, we set head homeward, arriving in due course at New Bedford.

CHAPTER XII.

THE POLAR BASIN.

Possibly had my first cruise lasted three years, as a whaling voyage often does, instead of only one, I might have been cured of my propensity—if not for a sea life itself, for that particular kind of it. As it was, I was not yet sated with it. The taste I had of it, with but one incident which could claim to be called an adventure, rather increased my desire to continue it. That the solitary "hair-breadth escape by flood" came near being the end of me, was no drawback to deter me from again tempting the dangers of the deep. It seemed rather to attract me back to the place where it had occurred, and thither I determined on returning—on board the Flying Cloud as before.

With some knowledge of seamanship, and my experience gained as a whalesman, I had no longer any difficulty in finding a ship. I could have had pick and choice from a whole fleet of them about leaving New Bedford for various whaling stations in the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans. But I stuck to my colors, or rather to the old craft, partly because I had come to like her skipper, kind-hearted, notwithstanding his dissipated habits. For his dissipation went no further than the drink; in other respects he was a decent man, a good seaman, brave as a lion, genial, and generous to a fault. If I liked not his first officer as well, still I had a sort of friendship for him, or, at all events, gratitude. However unpleasant it might be to "remember Bill," I also remembered, that the man who so cautioned me had saved my life at the risk of his own, and felt confident that he would do it again—in the event of a like danger occurring to me, and he by my side.

Another reason why I clung to the Flying Cloud. On her next cruise, now projected, she was not going after *cachalot*; but to chase the great "bowhead," the largest of whales, which was said to abound in what was called the "Polar Basin"—that portion of the Arctic seas beyond and inside of Behring's Straits. This whaling ground had late come into vogue, with the repute of being the richest in all the five oceans; and Captain Drinkwater was determined on giving it a trial. So, soon as the barque had discharged her cargo of sperm oil, and got a fresh coat of paint, with other necessary repairs, we were off again.

You may be supposing that meanwhile I went home and paid, as a dutiful son should, respects to my mother, with all sorts of apologies for my bad, disobedient behavior. I did nothing of the sort; only wrote her a letter to say I was still alive, and starting on a fresh cruise; giving, as an excuse for my not coming near her, that the ship was to sail sooner than I had anticipated. As I afterward discovered, she had grown somewhat reconciled to what I had done, and the course of life adopted. Pecuniary adversity had come upon her, or at least enough of it to make her more satisfied that one of her sons should earn his bread by risking the dangers of the sea.

I knew not of this, however, when, for the second time, taking service in a whaler—not now as an apprentice, but ordinary seaman—and only thought of the adventures that awaited me beyond Behring's Straits.

Once more doubling the Horn, and sailing from

south to north of the far-stretching Pacific, in due time we sighted the "Diomedes Islands," which stand like grim sentinels in that gateway leading into the so-called Arctic Ocean.

I had been accustomed to associate with the word "ocean" a sea of limitless extent and almost unfathomable depth. But my experience of that part of the Polar Sea, which belongs to the map of the western hemisphere, quite contradicts such an idea. Once beyond the Straits of Behring and well out on this so-called ocean, we found it more resembling a wide sound, with convenient anchorage obtainable anywhere; its surface, save when stirred by a strong wind, smooth and waveless as that of an inland pond! The greatest depth to be found in the "Polar Basin" is ridiculously little, compared with soundings in any of the other grand divisions of the briny deep. Perhaps in no part of it does the log line need letting out beyond thirty fathoms before the lead touches the bottom.

Until within the last thirty years geographical knowledge of the sea beyond Behring's Straits was of the scantiest and most limited kind. The records of it left by its ill-fated discoverer were both vague and unsatisfactory, while for centuries after not much was added to them. The short summer cruises of Cook, Kotzebue, and Beechey threw further light upon the Polar Basin by way of general knowledge; but it was not till the powers of curiosity were roused to activity—attracted by the wealth there discovered to exist in the shape of whale blubber, or its product, oil—that the world was made more intimately acquainted with this remote region of the sea's wilderness.

In the year 1848, Captain Roys, master and owner of the barque Superior, carried home to Tay harbor, the port whence he had sailed, a cargo of oil which proved that the "right" or "Great Greenland" whale could be as profitably chased on the Pacific side of the American continent as it had hitherto been in Baffin's Bay and the North Atlantic. The consequence was a rush of whalers round Cape Horn and up to the seas, which on one side wash the shores of north-western America, and on the other those of north-eastern Asia.

And many a fortune has been made by these early adventurers; who, either by luck or quickness of wit, took time, as it were, by the forelock.

CHAPTER XIII.

A WAGER ON A WHALE.

It was on a beautiful summer's day in mid-July, when the Flying Cloud sailed past the Diomedes and dropped anchor off East Cape, within a few miles of the land. We were not alone. At least a dozen other vessels lay around us, all like ourselves after the blubber and bone of the "bowhead," as the great Polar whale is called in contradistinction to the regular "right" whale; which last is to be sought for in lower latitudes, between the parallels of 40° deg. and 60° deg.

It was quite calm when we came to anchor; and continued so throughout the whole night, if night it could be called. For inside Behring's Straits, which are just on the Arctic circle, at this period the sun's disk is never much more than the breadth of its own diameter below the horizon, and a sort of subdued twilight reigns even at the hour of midnight. Ordinary print can be read without lamp or candle, and whales can not only be sighted, but successfully chased, throughout all the twenty-four hours.

From our anchorage we had a view of the Arctic coast bending away westward—a bleak, sterile shore, than which nothing could be more cheerless or forbidding. Numerous patches and "streams" of loose ice were seen trending parallel to the shoreline, far as the eye could reach. But from this no danger was apprehended, as none of the drifting pieces were of sufficient size or weight to injure a sound and stoutly-built vessel such as the Flying Cloud. Nor was the coast at the time ice-bound; a considerable space of open water interposing between the ice-streams and the land. In this part of the Arctic ocean such ice as the navigator has to contend against is always low, rising but a few feet above the water's surface. It is dangerous withal, but nothing like that in either the Greenland or Antarctic seas, where great "bergs," often towering two hundred feet into the air, are encountered. The reason for their not being met with near Behring's Straits, is obvious. Icebergs, as now generally admitted, are simply the ends of glaciers pushed down into the sea through great gorges in the shore cliffs, and snapped off by the agitation of the waves. As a consequence, they cannot exist around Behring's Straits, where the land is low-lying, with no high cliffs, nor mountains and their gorges, to give birth to the glaciers. If there were, the sea outside is not deep enough to float the huge fragments, termed icebergs, which they might send into it. True, some are seen rising twenty or thirty feet above its surface, but these are nearly always grounded on the bottom.

During that, our first night spent in the Polar Basin, we kept look-out for "bowheads" with the barque's boats ready to be dropped at the sight of one. As we could see, all the other vessels around us were vigilant as ourselves. But no whales were sighted by any of us. Walruses we could hear roaring and bellowing in-shore, but their bodies were not visible against the gloomy background of the barren coast.

As day broke, Captain Drinkwater, eager for action, ordered "anchor up," and the barque's head set for a point further to the west, where it was hoped whales might be found. Indeed, as yet not a "spout" had shown itself over the sea. The other vessels also drew up their anchors, spread sail, and slipped away, each choosing its own course.

Taking advantage of a light breeze from the land, we soon made an offing of about fifteen miles, when

our skipper, who had meanwhile gone back to his berth and taken a nap, returned upon deck again.

After a turn or two round the capstan, rubbing his hands, in evident enjoyment of the fresh bracing air, he ordered the steward to "bring up breakfast." Then turning to his first officer with a look of beaming satisfaction, he said:

"Well, Mr. Coffin, here we are in the great Polar Basin at last—the wonderful whaling ground. What do you think of it?"

"So far not much, Cap," drawled the son of Nantucket. "Thar don't appear to be much ile about here."

"Oh, there's plenty, no doubt. What'll you bet we don't strike a whale before night?"

"Wal," rejoined the mate, "I don't know as I care to bet *against* gettin' one. I'd rather lay my stake on t'other side. Though if I did, I'd be likely to lose it. The ground just here looks rather dry, and I guess we'll have to go further north before we see flukes."

"Not a knot," exclaimed the captain, triumphantly. "Look yonder! There's a whale on our quarter now; though he isn't exactly of the sort I'd like to see."

As the skipper spoke he pointed to a "finback" which we had all, except himself, seen dodging around the barque for the last half-hour, but without taking notice of it; this sort of whale being not only most difficult to capture, but scarce worth capturing. They are to be met with in every part of the ocean where the keel of ship has penetrated, high latitudes or low, *on* soundings or *off*. But whalesmen usually pass them by, soon as their species is identified.

"That won't do for a whale, Cap," quietly observed the mate. "If we put after it, I guess you'd lose your bet—supposin' you made it."

"Never mind, Mr. Coffin. We'll stick our harpoons into blubber before night, and something better than a finback. But I'm still willing to make the bet. Will you take it?"

"Oh, I don't mind," assented the mate; "what's it to be?"

"Bottle of champagne, and box of best Havana's."

"Done!"

The old hands of the crew, who were near enough to hear this dialogue, knew very well that the confidence of Captain Drinkwater about striking a whale that day was all mere moonshine and guess-work—a random prediction based on no definite data; since none such exist. For the "bowhead" whale is in its movements most capricious and uncertain. Not the most experienced whalesman can tell when and whence he will come, or whether go. To-day every ship in a whaling fleet may be seen chasing and harpooning them; to-morrow not a spout is to be sighted all round the horizon; and no one can predict whether they may turn up again, or have gone clear away to some other and distant part of the great deep, to be met no more that season.

Just as the captain and his first officer had closed the bet, a school of "killers" was reported by the man at the masthead. These are themselves whales of a certain species, easily distinguished by their long triangular humps, or "topmost staysails," as whalesmen characteristically call them. Their yield of oil being limited as that of the "finbacks," they are only chased when *leviathan* is not about.

Soon after the killers came in sight, the Flying Cloud, still keeping to her course, passed so near the "school" that we could have "gallied" them. But neither our captain, nor any one on board, thought of lowering boats for such small deer. It would have been deemed a waste of time. So the Flying Cloud plowed her way on, looking out for larger game.

But scarce had we made another cable's length, when we noticed that instead of scattering off at the sight of our presence momentarily caused them, they instantly recovered from it, rallying in our track astern, confident, and as thickly crowded as ever.

The cause soon declared itself; several on the barque's deck simultaneously crying out, "She blows!" as the spout of a large whale was seen ascending from the very midst of the school of killers.

"Down boats!" commanded our captain, at the same time issuing the necessary directions to "bout ship!"

In another instant the Flying Cloud's crew, hitherto listlessly lounging about the decks, were leaping "pon the boat davits with the agility of apes.

CHAPTER XIV.

A "MUSCLE-DIGGER" AMONG THE "KILLERS."

Short as was the time occupied in bringing the barque about, and lowering her boats, we of the crew saw enough to make us wonder why all this trouble was being taken. For we recognized the species of whale which was sending up its spout, and knew it to be only a "muscle-digger"—another of the *cetacea* which figures under a variety of names; among them "ripsack" and "California gray," and is believed to be peculiar to northern latitudes. But in any case it is a small animal in comparison with many of its congeners, seeming a very pygmy alongside either the "polar" or "right" whale, though in general shape resembling these, and, like them, lacking the hump or protuberance on the back, erroneously called a "fin."

In point of fact no whales have a dorsal fin; the thing so designated being simply a projection of the blubber, altogether actionless and immovable. But, as the shape of this excrescence or organ, whose use is unknown, differs in the different species, it offers a good guide to the experienced whalesman, who avails himself of it in their identification.

The one now spouting so near showed no "fore-

topmast stay-sail"; but other characteristics telling it to be a "muscle-digger." And as the Flying Cloud's crew knew this sort of whale as yielding an oil both inferior in quality and short in quantity—its bone besides being almost worthless—they were surprised at Captain Drinkwater having ordered the ship about. The more from their being aware that the muscle-digger is one of the shiest and most difficult of cetaceans to approach—still more difficult to capture.

In the present case, however, all this was made easy for them. Before the boats could be got into the water, the spouting of the whale had been seen several times and its blowing heard; the latter at each fresh respiration giving out a sound different from that which preceded, till at length its ring alike indicated rage and terror. The greenest hand among us could not be mistaken about the cause; clearly it was the "killers"—a species of grampus. They were all around, assaulting it on every side, as a pack of prairie wolves would a wounded buffalo.

Although we were ourselves on the way to murder the whale without mercy, yet the sight of such odds against it—of its own kind, too, for the killer is a true cetacean—affected us; especially the second mate, who commanded the boat I was in.

"It isn't fair play," cried this young officer, "and, by Jove! I'll pay one of the brutes out for it."

Saying which, he rose to his feet, and jabbed his harpoon into a "killer" that had shown its "stay-sail" too close to our boat for its own safety. He but aimed to give it a stab, however; and drawing the weapon back again resumed his seat; when we quickly rejoined the other boats, our consorts, and continued on to the attack of the muscle-digger.

Difficult as this species is to capture in the ordinary way, we saw this one was at our mercy; as it was captured for us without the necessity of either pitching harpoon or using lance. Before our boats got up to it we could see that the killers had well-nigh completed their work. For the swinging blows of the muscle-digger's flukes, delivered right and left, had become more feeble, with longer intervals between, while the movements of the body showed the quivering convulsive action which indicates the approach of death.

Dashing up to it, the sight and surging of our boats scared the killers, sending them off from their victim, and it was left to be dealt with by its human enemy.

On approach we saw it was neither dead nor subdued yet; and something more must be done ere we could tow it to the barque. So a couple of harpoons were launched, their barbs sinking deep into its body. The result, not as usual, "up flukes" and going under, with no end of line to be let out, and an anxious watch for its coming to the surface again. It was too far gone to go down, the killers having disabled it for that; and the next puff from its spiracles, instead of being clear, salt-water spray, rose up of a deep red color—the blood which our harpoons had set flowing from its most vital veins.

And still the creature was not dead. There were the last agonies—the "flurry" to come; and well was it that the two officers who had charge of the attacking boats were aware of this fact.

"Boats off!" they both shouted, simultaneously, as they saw the harpoons fixed. Not an instant too soon. For the monster in its death throes struck a series of murdering blows with its tail, which it seemed still able to wield with the quickness and elasticity of a whip-lash.

Luckily we had got beyond reach of its rapidly vibrating flukes; and could look on in calm confidence till the convulsive action came to an end. After which we brought the boats alongside, hooked on, and bore our prize back with us to the barque.

"Now, Mr. Coffin!" triumphantly called out the captain, as we were hauling "ripsack" into the fluke-chains. "Didn't I tell you we'd get a whale before night?"

"Wal, Cap," rejoined Lige, with a contemptuous glance toward the body of the dead muscle-digger, "if you call *that* a whale you were right. For my part, I don't think it deserves the name, an' it wasn't worth the trouble's been at taken it. All the oil in its ugly carcass won't fill three casks."

"Never mind about that," evasively returned the skipper, with a self-satisfied air; "I said a *whale*, and that's one—good enough to get me the half of a bottle of champagne, and the whole of a box of best Havanas. Ha-ha-ha!"

And he chuckled gleefully, the mate making a grimace at being taken in, as he verily believed himself to have been.

"Suppose we have the wine now!" continued the captain, in the same tone of jocularity, "just by way of commemorating our first whale killed in the Polar Basin. And I'll let you off with the cigars till we are back at Bedford."

"Oh, all right! I'm agreeable."

"Steward! A bottle of champagne—Clicquot. Charge to Mr. Coffin."

The silver-necked bottle was soon brought on the quarter-deck, where it was uncorked, and poured out into glasses; all the officers of the barque being invited to partake of it. But the captain being in good humor with himself that morning, an extra ration of rum all round was served out to the crew, as he told them, by way of baptizing the Polar Basin.

CHAPTER XV.

A BABY WALRUS.

JUST as we had finished tossing off the drinks, a herd of *walrus* made its appearance quite close to the ship; these curious cetaceans, as they rose to the surface giving out a guttural roar, altogether unlike anything in the way of sound I had ever heard, or with which I could compare it. Head after head came popping up, till at least fifty were above water, each adding its groan to the general chorus,

when the noise became positively terrific. Then they separated into several groups, extending in a circle around the barque, and with a menacing air, as if they meant making an attack on her!

"Suppose we pitch into them!" suggested Mr. Ransom, the second mate, an ambitious young officer keen for action. "May we, sir?" he asked, addressing himself to the captain.

"Certainly, if you want to," conceded his superior, entering into the spirit of the sport. For the *walrus* is never hunted by whalers save for amusement, or in default of bigger and more valuable game. "Go ahead and distinguish yourself!" jocularly added the skipper: "you'll never have a better chance."

We were soon back into the boats, which were still on the water, around the dead muscle-digger. Seizing the oars, we turned "face to the music," and shot straight and swift for the largest clump of the sea-horses."

As we rowed toward them other groups joined the one aimed at, until nearly all were again together, huddled in a close herd. We expected to see them "sound" or take flight. Instead, they courageously stood their ground, their heads elevated high in air, all grunting angrily. Their long white teeth contrasting with the dark color of their muzzles, imparting to them a most formidable appearance. Nor were they to be made light of; as the *walrus*, or *morse*, as sometimes called, is a most dangerous antagonist, especially to men approaching as we were in an ordinary ship's boat.

"Drive the iron into that big fellow," called out Mr. Ransom, to his boat-steerer, pointing to one which seemed the largest of the lot, an old bull.

At the word away went the harpoon, plunging deep into the sea-horse's side, where it stuck. There was a short jerk upon the line; we "snubbed" it hard, and held on all.

At the stroke a thick jet of blood gushed out over the water, and the *walrus* went under, all the others disappearing suddenly, and as if by magic! But the fellow we had fixed and were holding on to our line, instantly rose to the surface again; and uttering a defiant growl, turned upon us and showed fight.

Just then we could not help noticing how perfectly the offensive armor of this animal is adapted for the capsizing of a boat. Its huge tusks in their downward course once hooked over the gunwale, with the weight of its huge body bearing upon it, and the largest boat must go bottom upward.

The wounded *walrus* seemed itself thoroughly conscious of this, in its assaults raising its head aloft, then rapidly lowering it, see-saw fashion, like a man in the act of sneezing—its object evidently to grapple onto the gunwale. But before it could effect its purpose, Mr. Ransom, poising his whale spade, inflicted a deep gash in its throat, at which it again went under water, disappearing beneath a pool of its own blood.

We took it for granted it was now mortally wounded, and could feel it whirling and struggling upon the line, which for a time was kept taut. But at length the tension became relaxed, as we imagined because of the *walrus* being dead. So we pulled in—to see at the line's end only the pole, socket, and a small portion of the harpoon's shank! The tough blade of iron had actually been twisted off by the writhing rotatory motion of the beast while struggling in its throes—and we saw no more of that sea-horse!

But the herd still remained near, and their heads were now once more above water, all bellowing as before. At our next assault upon them we had better success, and secured a large "cow," as the whalers call the female *walrus*—though by their *alias* of sea-horse, it might more appropriately be named a mare. Each of the other boats, for they were all in chase, captured one as well.

But to none occurred an incident as that attending ours, though all were witness to it; and a more affecting scene I cannot remember. As we took a turn at the "loggerhead" with the short warp, for towing our capture to the ship, a diminutive *walrus*, evidently a sucking calf, or foal if you prefer it, unseen till now, suddenly made its appearance by the side of the slaughtered cow. There could be no mistaking the fact that she was, or had been, its mother. Its actions proved the maternity, as it swam round and round her, uttering plaintive cries, just as a lamb would bleat beside the dead body of its dam.

Rough whalesmen as were the spectators of this tragedy of the sea, not one of them but was nigh shedding tears; and I need not add, few thought of pitching lance or harpoon at the little nursling. To have killed the creature then would have seemed rank murder, and something more.

When the body of its mother, attached to the harpoon line, became stretched out horizontally, by our boat making headway, it crawled up to, and sat perched upon, it; and was thus towed on to the ship's side the whole of the way, at intervals giving out its piteous infantile moan. Even after the line was taken aboard and hauled up short, it instinctively clung to the carcass, every now and then upturning its eyes to the murderers of its mother; who, gathered in the ship's waist, looked down upon it, the countenances of all expressing the pity it seemed to claim from them.

For a time there was no movement made on the deck of the Flying Cloud, her crew standing silent, as men around a coffin about being lowered into the grave. You will scarce give me credit when I tell you that I saw tears trickling down more than one weather-beaten cheek. And it was as though a bombshell had exploded in our midst, when a heartless fellow—I am happy to say there were not many of his kind in that crew—cried out:

"Pitch a harpoon into the pup and haul it aboard!" This was done, nevertheless, the captain himself commanding it. But from motives of compassion,

not cruelty. Mercy called for the sacrifice; for without its mother the little creature must have died a slower and more painful death.

CHAPTER XVI.

A DESERT SHORE.

To our disappointment, and somewhat to Captain Drinkwater's surprise, we worked for weeks in the Polar Basin without doing any great stroke of business in the way of getting whale-oil. Instead of the "bow-heads" being in plenty, as we had expected to find them, they were unusually scarce. The cause of this no doubt was, that in the preceding season they had been much chased; the repute of the place, that had for some time been abroad, having of late years drawn thither quite a fleet of whaling vessels. And as during this same season it was increased, rather than diminished, such whales as showed spout were at once set after by the nearest ship; so that the scare among the *cetaceans* in that quarter, renewed and constantly kept up, made them shyer and more wary than ever.

We had begun to despair of getting a full cargo; and returning to New Bedford with an empty vessel, or one but half-full, is a humiliation no whalesman likes to undergo. The fear of it was not alone confined to our skipper, but affected the whole crew.

In this state of mind we had been for days beating along the Siberian coast, not far from Cape North, and within sight of land, but still out of sight of "Leviathan," when Mr. Ransom, whom I have already described as an ambitious young officer, approaching the captain, said:

"Don't you think, sir, we might go in with the boats, and have a search along shore?"

"Yes," answered the captain, dubiously, as he turned his eyes shoreward. "But do you think you can get in? It looks as if there wasn't a crack to squeeze through."

He spoke of the ice, a "stream" of which extended parallel to the shore far as the eye could reach. It was *drift* ice, having a width of between one and two miles, with a still wider list of open water between it and the land. Loose, too, the stream was; the pieces composing it being of moderate size, and not large enough to endanger a ship. With a fair working breeze the Flying Cloud might have safely stood through it, and no doubt would, had her captain been sure there was anything on the inshore side to make the risk worth running. But as the telescope leveled in that direction discovered no spout of whale, it was voted "barren ground," or, at all events unlikely to be a lay for bow-heads. The second mate, however, seemed of a different opinion.

"I've just come down from the masthead," he urged. "There's a good breadth of open water inshore, and looks deep enough for any sort of whale. Besides, I noticed several breaks in the ice, where a boat might work through safe enough in weather like this."

It was dead calm, with scarce a ripple on the sea. "All right, Mr. Ransom," at length cheerily assented his superior. "Go ahead! If you think there's any chance of finding a whale in yonder, why, find it. There's nothin like trying."

This brief dialogue on the quarter-deck ended in an order for the barque's three boats, instead of only one, being lowered; the three mates to take command of them—the captain himself the only officer to remain aboard. So off we all pulled, heading straight for the low-lying land.

We had no great difficulty in getting through the ice. Had there been a strong wind blowing, or even a fresh breeze, it might have been difficult and risky enough. But, as I have said, it was perfectly calm, and the blocks of no great bulk or weight; so that, even where they lay close together, we could push them apart with a boat-hook, and pass safely between. Besides, there were wide reaches here and there, altogether free of ice, one of them running transverse to the stream and quite across it. Through this we went in at a quick *laisse*, and without any interruption.

Soon as inside, the boats became separated, each taking its own course to search for "bow-heads." Had there been any such near we could not have failed to find them. The water was as smooth as a swan-pond, and the plunging of a gull might have been seen miles off. Many gulls we saw, but no spout from the spiracles of a cetacean.

We rowed on along shore, till about the hour of noon, our eyes ungratified by the sight of a whale, save two or three small "finbacks." But these we did not look upon as foes worthy of our steel, and even if we had, they were so shy no boat could approach them within striking distance.

"There don't appear to be a bow-head about," said Mr. Ransom, despondingly. "So, let's put ashore and eat dinner," he added, bringing the boat's head round; and a few seconds after we shot her bow onto the beach.

Having made the craft secure, we picked out the dryest spot, for it was nearly all wet, boggy ground; and, sitting down, discussed our mid-day meal. No great variety of dishes, since it consisted of "hard tack" biscuits, and "bovine mahogany," as whalesmen jocularly call the beef provided for them. We had brought along a ration already cooked, so that there was no need for kindling a fire.

An oblong hill or ridge rose over the spot where we made our bivouac; and, after finishing our frugal repast, Mr. Ransom started to ascend it, taking me with him. His object was to get a view of the open water along shore, and see whether there were any whales in it.

Climbing up the hill was anything but easy, though the slope was of the gentlest; for the ground was soft and wet, its surface consisting of little soggy turf-knolls, standing apart, the spaces between being black mud, on which we dared not trust our feet. We could only plant them in the grass-

grown hummocks, and even out of these the water squirted at every step we took as from so many saturated sponges. Around us, the snow, but partially melted, lay in patches, imparting to the landscape a chill and cheerless aspect. At best of times and seasons it is anything but an agreeable country; and this being our first tour in the territory of the Czar our impressions of it were almost as unfavorable as those the French must have received in their famous raid upon Moscow.

CHAPTER XVII.

A WHALE "WINKING."

LEAPING from knoll to knoll, Mr. Ransom led up the slope; I literally following in his footsteps, since I saw that he chose the firmest on our line of march. At length as his head rose to the level of the hill's top, he suddenly came to a stand, motioning to me to do likewise.

"Keep quiet!" he said, in a half-whisper. "Come up here, and you'll see something worth seeing."

I obeyed, and slipped up beside him. To note, first, that what we had mistaken for the combing of a ridge was the crest of a cliff which overhung the sea. There was another and twin cliff directly opposite, and between the two a narrow strait or neck of water, opening into a little bay, rock-bound all around. It was nothing of this, however, the second mate had called me up to see. Instead, an enormous whale—a bow-head—judging by its dimensions at least an "eighty-barreler," which occupied the cove. It was lying at rest, its back high above the surface, and near the entrance to the inlet, as though guarding it. As the water was perfectly calm, and so clear we could distinguish shells at the bottom, though several fathoms deep, the body of the bow-head, in all its shapes and proportions, was outlined under our eyes, as if within the glass tank of an aquarium! We saw it was a bull, and one of the largest size—in all likelihood a hundred years old, as could be told by its grand "arch," and the broad patches of white around the spout-holes. As we looked down into these—for our position on the cliff enabled us to do so—we could see them at intervals opening and closing, or "winking" in whaleman's phrase; a curious sight, which even the oldest blubber-hunter cannot say he has often witnessed.

"I never saw the like before," muttered Mr. Ransom, as we stood regarding it; "nor ever had a whale so well under my eyes—that is a live one—though I've been chasing them since I was a bit of a boy. Look at the old bull, how he is behaving! He seems to be enjoying himself mightily."

And so he certainly did. There lay the gigantic creature, basking in the clear, still water just as a diminutive trout or gold-fish might be seen in an artificial pond. For all differing from either in something besides size; since every now and then the stillness around was broken by his deep, slow respirations, as the breath of his huge body was belched up through his spiracles. Now and then, also, he gave a flap of his immense tail, as if in sheer sportiness, its broad flukes scaling from right to left, and vice versa, causing a commotion in the water as if from the paddles of a stern-wheel steamer.

In silence we stood watching him and his movements for a long while, though still not satisfied. As professional whalesmen it was a sight we should not have soon tired of. Nor was it cut short by us, but through an incident unexpected, itself a curious one. Cutting the cliff opposite was a ravine or gorge, which we had noticed as being choke-full of ice—in short, containing a sort of miniature glacier. The hot meridian sun—for it was hot notwithstanding the snow around—seemed to have affected the glacier, so far melting it that the lower end snapped off, and came down with a plunge into the tranquil cove. A thundering crash, too, which sent the water off before it in a grand circling eddy, like the sea swell after a storm. The bow-head did not abide its approach; sounding at the first crackle heard as the glacier gave way. But instead of going under in the usual orthodox fashion, we noticed that he went down by a gradual slant, showing him well acquainted with that cove, where the depth of the water would not admit of his "turning flukes."

Though much interested in the rare and curious spectacle of which we had been witness, the second mate of the Flying Cloud was not forgetful of the duty he owed to his ship and her owners. So, soon as the berg broke off, and the whale went under, he turned back to the place of our bivouac, I, of course, with him, both going down the hill much faster than we had ascended it.

"To the boat!" he cried out to our comrades, as we made approach to them. "Quick! gather up, and bring everything along with you."

As there were not many things to be gathered up, we were soon once more in the boat, each on his own thwart, and grasping the oar that belonged to him.

Ten minutes' rowing brought us round to the entrance of the bay, in which we had observed the bow-head. But although we approached the place with utmost caution, silently as though our oars were muffled—for we took care to make no noise in the rowlocks—we could see no bow-head nor whale of any kind. And after laying to for nearly an hour, all the time carefully watching the surface of the cove, as that of the sea outside, we saw no spout, not so much as a ripple on the surface. The berg broken from the glacier was there, slowly floating off from the cliff it had forsaken, with a motion barely perceptible, the water around having regained its placidity. But where was *leviathan*?

No one could answer this question, which was a puzzle to some of us—the juniors in the boat. Not so, however, to the steerer, an old hand; nor yet to Mr. Ransom himself, who, though young in years, was old in whaling experience.

"The whale must have gone below and stayed

there," was the dictum of the boat-steerer, after we had watched to the end of our patience. "An' there's no knowin' how long it may keep under," he continued, with a disconsolate look; "supposin' it to be a bow-head. You're sure it was that, sir?"

The question which was addressed to the young officer rather irritated him, as casting a doubt on his professional capabilities.

"Am I sure that my name's Ransom?" he sharply rejoined. "Of course it was a bow-head."

"Beg your pardon, sir," said the boat-steerer, seeing he had committed himself. "But I didn't know you'd had a fair sight o' the fish. Bein' a bow-head, then there's no tellin' how long he'll stay below. Them sort can stick to the bottom, same as crabs or ground-sharks."

"Put the boat about!" commanded Mr. Ransom, still seeming a little vexed, despite the steerer's detailed explanation. "It's no use hanging about here any longer. Let's look up the other boats, and get back to the barque."

Heading once more to the open water, we were soon alongside the boats of the first and third mates; the former, as senior in rank, having set his "waif" as a signal for us to rejoin him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

NEARLY "NIPPED."

MR. RANSOM was a good deal out of sorts at our non-success, the more from having himself counseled the search, which had proved bootless. But if it could be any consolation to him, on getting alongside the other boats we learnt that neither of them had been a whit more fortunate than ourselves. In a way not as much; we had seen a *bowhead*, while they had only fallen in with a *finback*, which they did not deem worth chasing.

It was not his failure to find a whale, however, that had brought the dark cloud upon Lige Coffin's brow, with a look of nervous anxiety into his eyes, which we observed on rejoining him. This was due to a cause now palpable to all of us. A change had taken place in the sky, which had become overcast, while a breeze that had sprung up to eastward was beginning to blow along shore, already rippling the hitherto tranquil surface of the sea.

The barque was quite visible out in the offing, but between her and us extended the ice-stream of more than two miles' width. If the breeze should come to a blow, or even freshen much further, we might have a difficulty in making our way back through it, to say nothing of the danger.

To make matters worse it had got to be late, the sun nigh down, and—still another ugly look-out for us—a haze had begun to gather over both the ice-field and the open water. As yet it was only a thin film, but there was every sign of it thickening, for to windward it appeared denser already.

"I don't like the look of things, any way," remarked the first mate, in his grave, lugubrious voice, as the three boats drew up together. "We can see the bark now, but if that fog drifts down on her we mayn't much longer."

He was gazing up wind, when, suddenly turning, he added, in a more lively tone:

"Well, if we calculate sleeping on board of the Cloud this night we've got to make quick work. Oars, give way! Pull ahead!"

The crews of the other two boats taking the order as equally meant for themselves, all three started together, in a direct pull for the ice belt. But the first mate's boat being the fastest, forged ahead of the others, and was well into the field before either of them got up to its edge.

As we could not help noting, the ice had a very different look now. The loose blocks, agitated by the breeze, had begun to move and drift along, pressing and grinding against one another; so that the least experienced of us in Arctic navigation could tell that passage through it would be dangerous. There was no help for it, however, but to keep on, or turn and make back to the shore.

Of course, we had no thought of doing the last; so heading into the channel, which had been taken by the first officer's boat, we made all haste after. Our boat was second, and in its wake, at about an oar's distance, followed that in charge of the third mate, Mr. Grover.

For some three or four cables' length we got along well enough. But then the channel narrowed, and seemed as if it would close quite up. The loose ice-blocks detached from the windward side were encroaching on the open water; for, in addition to the impulse given them by the breeze, they were evidently acted upon by an under-current, that carried them along, as though down a sharp-flowing stream. This we could tell by the bearings of the barque, that were constantly changing. At first starting for her, she was directly in front of the open list, and so right ahead of us. But now she appeared on our larboard bow, and was still falling off, or rather was it our boats drifting away from her. Of course, we knew this, and were all the more apprehensive as to our situation.

"What do you think about it?" asked the second mate, leaning round and speaking back to Mr. Grover in the other boat.

"That we're in a tarnation fix," was the not very encouraging reply; the less so from our knowing the third officer, a veteran "blubber-hunter," to be a man not given to desponding.

"I can see that for myself," rejoined Ransom. "But what had we better do?"

"Wal; the best thing we can do is to get out o' this ice soon as possible—an' by the shortest cut we kin take."

"That means to put about, and row back to land. We're not half-way across the field, yet—not near."

This caused all to turn their eyes alternately landward and seaward, we at the oars glancing anxiously over our shoulders. The barque was still in sight,

but barely visible through the fog, which had in the meantime become more dense; while the first mate's boat could just be discerned as a speck near the outer edge of the ice stream, and seemingly sure of clearing it.

But there was no likelihood of our being able to do so—not the smallest chance of it. More than a mile of the ugly obstruction still stretched between us and the open water, and we could see that near the offing the channel was now as good as closed against us. Even at the point we had reached, it had narrowed till the ice-blocks began to interfere with the play of our oars, one every now and then getting separated from the field, and bumping against the sides of our boats.

Simultaneously the oar stroke on both was suspended, and for a few seconds held so, while the two officers, standing up, looked either way, as if balancing in their minds whether it should be "ship or shore." But there was no choice now. Any chance for us to reach the offing hitherto, if such had been, was instantly cut off by the view seaward becoming altogether obscured. The fog hid it; a heavy bank brought down by the breeze, tumbling and rolling along the surface of the ice-field, as smoke from a forest on fire. Simultaneously it shut off the first mate's boat and barque from our sight, though that mattered little now. Even if still in view, to reach them had become absolutely impossible.

"Lay round, Mr. Grover!" called out the second mate, at length deciding to turn back. "Let's pull for the shore. It's our only hope for safety."

There was no opposition to the order, nor delay in the execution of it. The old whalesman had himself already counseled it as the best course; so about went both craft in scarce enough of seaway to bring round.

Of course, the movement brought the third mate's boat into the lead, and we kept close in her wake; so close, we could at any time have chucked a biscuit into her. For all this, the bit of open water between the two was in places so narrow, and kept further narrowing, that several times we were in danger of getting "steel-trapped," as the men facetiously termed it. But not at the time; just then we had something else to think of than jesting, and we were in no mood for merriment. All knew that our peril was extreme; for if boatless, and thrown amid the moving ice-field, it would surely carry us to destruction.

As it was, we were every now and then compelled to spring out upon it, and stamp off its sharp edges with our boot-heels to open a passage for the boats. And once we were actually obliged to grasp ours by the gunwales, lift her bodily out of the water, and run her, sleigh-fashion, over a broad fragment which had completely blocked up the channel.

It was no child's play getting back to the Siberian shore; we had work enough to do, and sufficient of danger in the doing it. But it was to do or die, as we all too well knew; for the boats once crushed, our lives would not be worth continuing the struggle for. There was but a bit of cedar board, scarce half an inch thick, between us and eternity!

For nigh another half-mile we had to carry on our conflict with the ice; an element whalesmen have often to contend with, and hold in as much dread as either wind or water. But we were victorious, though not without receiving wounds; at least our boats did, the frail structures sustaining much damage from the sharp-edged ice. Still by bailing, we were able to keep them afloat; and at length reached the belt of open water in-shore, across which we pulled directly landward, with lighter hearts.

We had lately parted from that land, deeming it hateful and inhospitable, as it was barren and desolate. But now returning to it, with a vivid idea of the dangers just undergone, it seemed to us a very desirable land indeed, if not one "flowing with milk and honey."

CHAPTER XIX.

A COLD CAMPING-GROUND.

As we closed in upon the shore, our eyes were on the alert for the place where we had landed before, as it was excellent beaching-ground; but no such spot was in sight! This, to our astonishment, at first; though a moment's reflection explained its invisibility. We had been all the while moving westward along the coast, as the drift-ice carried us, and we were now miles from our former landing-ground. Except that we must have also lengthened our distance from the ship, it mattered little; so, pulling in to the shore, we beached our boats and made them fast to moorings.

It was now so near dead darkness, we had barely time to choose a place for our camp; our choice being limited to finding one dry enough to lie down in. No easy task either; since here, as elsewhere, the ground was sodden with water—almost a swamp.

After treading about for a time among the tussocks, our heavy whaling-boots squeezing the juice out of them as from oranges, we came upon a patch that lay higher, and was comparatively dry. A large rock guided us to it, the only thing in the shape of stone to be seen, inland of the beach itself. A huge mass it was—evidently an erratic boulder—with perpendicular sides and flat top, somewhat like a pedestal on which it was intended to place a statue. It stood centrally on the slight elevation, with enough of firm, dry soil around it to afford sleeping room at full stretch for our whole party.

There was no question of kindling a fire; we had not the fuel for it, unless by burning either our oars or the shafts of our whale-spears. Neither was it needed for cooking purposes, since we had nothing to cook. Having started out with but food supply for the day, and this already drawn upon almost to exhaustion, the only eatable article left us was the reserve stock of biscuits carried in the "lantern-keg" of every whale-boat when on active service.

Unluckily this was found even more limited than is usual, and gave each of us but a bite. So for that night our bill of fare was not only strict felon's diet—bread and water—but famine rations to boot.

We had other discomforts besides hunger, and far greater ones. Not for a moment imagining we should have to pass the night on shore, or elsewhere save in our snug bunks, we were, of course, without a stitch of bed-clothing, not even having brought our top-coats. And just as if it knew we were thus unprovided and had a special spite against us, the wind blew a keen north-easter that penetrated to the very marrow of our bones. So chill and cutting was it, that we began to think of tearing the thwarts out of our boats and converting them into firewood. There was a proposal to do so; and I verily believe it would have been carried into effect but for the occurrence of an incident which drew our minds away from it, for the time making us forgetful of both cold or hunger.

It was long after midnight, and still not a man of us asleep. Sleep was out of the question while shivering till our teeth rattled like castanets. We all lay awake, those of us that were lying down; but most were afoot on the lee side of the rock, stamping and dancing about to keep their toes from getting frost-bitten. Talking, too, of their empty stomachs, and speculating on what sort of food might turn up for us in the morning.

"Ye needn't be calc'latin' on any, boys," observed old Grover, who had seen something of Siberia before. "Thar ain't a thing long this God-forsaken shore, ethier animal or vegetal, that's eatable; even the beach, bare as ye see it, hain't hardly so much as a oyster-shell. The only livin' critter worth speakin' o', I ever see'd this part o' Siberia, war b'ars o' the Polar specie. In places them's plenty enough; though what they get to grub on be a myst'ry to me."

"I wish one would come this way now," put in a young blubber-hunter, who was as hungry as a wolf.

"Why d'ye wish that?" asked another.

"Why! To give us a bit of bear-ham for supper; or breakfast, as we might almost call it now. That would be better worth while breaking up the boats' thwarts for. But, by jollys! I, for one, shouldn't much care about its being cooked. I'm sharp-set enough to eat a bear raw; ay, the whole of one to myself."

"If he didn't first eat you," returned the third mate, with some sarcasm of tone, for the young whalesman was given to loose talking. "It's cl'ar, youngster, you don't know much 'bout the Syberian b'ar, or ye w'u'dn't be so weeshful to make close acquaintance wi' that four-footed critter. Hish! That's the bark of one now. It is, by the livin' Leviathan!"

At the first cautionary exclamation all had become silent, listening intently. To hear a sound, half-snort, half-grunt, yet still unlike either; a sound *sui generis*, which would have puzzled the greenhorns of us, new to Arctic seas, but for the old hands, who at once pronounced it the "sniff" of the Polar bear.

The night was anything but dark now, the moon having just arisen; and we could see clearly over a wide circle around us, but nothing that looked like bear or other quadruped. Possibly, had the plain been free of snow it would have been different. For this, partially thawed, lay in humps and patches, giving the ground a zebra-striped appearance, which made it more difficult to distinguish particular objects; and all the evidence we had of living thing near was that singular sound heard at short intervals, as of some one approaching who was troubled with a cold in its incipient stages, half-sneezing, half-coughing.

"It's a b'ar, sure!" reaffirmed the third mate. "Two, by gosh!" he hastily added, after a few seconds given to examining the snow-flecked surface. "The he an'she for sartin! An' od rot me ef that ain't a cub trotin' at thar heels! They're comin' this way too! Now, boys, we've got to look out for squalls! If they mean mischief it'll be a case o' thunder an' lightnin'."

By this we all had got sight of the two bears with their cub, for they were now so close as to be easily made out under the clear moonlight. We could see, too, they were not straying about, but making toward us in a straight line, as if on a scent. As we were to windward of them, it was evidently ourselves they scented—proof that they did mean mischief, as Grover had put it.

It was but a question of what we should do, with scanty time allowed to answer it. A double-barreled shot-gun, belonging to Mr. Ransom, was all the firearm we had with us; the only other weapon of any sort being a whale-spear which the third mate had brought up from his boat, more as a walking-staff to help him through the treacherous quagmire than aught else. In truth, we were not much better prepared to repel an attack of Polar bears, than would have been so many children playing in a school-ground.

Find ourselves thus helpless, our first thought was of retreat—of course, back to the boats. But, by sinister chance, that was the very direction in which the bears were approaching; for they, too, had come up from the beach. To attempt passing them would be to run right into their jaws.

For awhile we stood irresolute, not a man of us knowing what to do, though all fully, keenly conscious of danger. In fact, we regarded it as unavoidable, and that some of us would like enough fall victims to the well-known ferocity of the brutes advancing upon us. For in a retreat over such ground they could easily overtake us. And in that moment of indecision, as ill-luck would have it, we did the very thing we ought not to have done; or, rather, Mr. Ransom did it for us.

Thinking to stop their advance, he discharged

both barrels, right and left, at the two old bears, giving each its share of the shot; but as the gun had been loaded for ducks, he might as well have squirted water at them, or fired blank cartridge. Indeed, far better; since the effect was just as should have been expected. The shot stung the animals to fury, which, added to their carnivorous instincts, hastened their approach; and they now came on at a rush, screaming with rage and pain.

We were about to scatter off in a *suvre qui pent* flight, which would have saved some, but not all of us, when a voice was heard vo-lerating:

"Up to the rock, boys! We'll be safe there!"

It was old Grover who had conceived the happy idea—as we all knew it to be—he alone remembering what the rest of us in our fright had forgotten. Before settling ourselves for the night, several had climbed to the top of the boulder by a sloping, zigzag ledge, the only way its summit could be reached.

Needless to say we caught the hint, and ascended, quick as ever country boy swarmed up tree from the horns of a furious bull. But it was "nip and tuck" with us; for the she bear, seemingly far the fiercest, was close upon our heels. Grover himself, however, guarded our rear; and jobbing the enraged brute with his whale-spear somewhere about the jaws, made her think better of it, and for the time contented to stay below.

CHAPTER XX.

BESIEGED BY BEARS.

WHEN we were all upon the rock, feeling ourselves safe, and thinking how near it had been to the opposite, we could not resist a cheer of mutual congratulation. A true whalesman's *huzzza* was sent up; such as likely never before woke the echoes of that solitary shore. We were even more uplifted than after our escape from the ice "nip," for that had been but a probable scare, while this, for awhile, seemed certain—at least to one or other of us.

But soon our thoughts underwent a change, for the worse again. We had been "hollering" while still in the woods, and not yet out of the "bear-scrape"—anything but that. Looking below, we could see the brutes moving about there, but evidently without intention to take departure. They were circling around the rock, uttering angry snorts, now and then turning their snouts upward, the hot breath from their open mouths and nostrils ascending on the frosty air as smoke from the funnel of a steam-engine.

We had no fear of their being able to mount the boulder, even should they attempt it. For Grover, with his redoubtable spear, stood sentry at its only scalable point. But what of that? What was to be the upshot? This was the question, which in a short while arose to trouble us.

And more the older ones of our party than the younger. We, the "greenhorns," but little acquainted with the Polar bear and its nature, were loth to believe it the formidable monster our third mate had represented. We were soon to know, however, that it is not only naturally fierce, but when angered, implacable in its rage. As its congener, the "grizzly" of the Rocky Mountains, when wounded it will assail the enemy who has injured it, regardless of results; and, if foiled in obtaining immediate vengeance, will wait days for it, in sullen determination.

But without the knowledge of this, we had enough otherwise to disconcert and discomfort us. There were in all twelve, comprising the two boats' crews, and the flat top of the rock was not over twice as many square feet in superficial area. As a consequence, we had to stand upright, crowded together thick as sheep in a market-pen.

We were hungry, too; some keenly so. For, as a rule, whaling vessels are well provisioned, and the stomachs of whalesmen unaccustomed to being empty; which made us feel hunger all the more. But our sufferings from this source were trifling compared with the discomfort of the cold. Exposed on the summit of the boulder, we caught the keen blast from head to heel, that seemed to cut into our skins like an ice knife. To retain warmth in their bodies, many once more set to dancing up and down, as though they had become afflicted with the malady of St. Vitus.

The situation was worse than irksome, but *nolens-volens* we had to bear it. Possibly we could have borne it with better patience, had there been a prospect of its coming to a termination within any reasonable time. But there was none such to fortify us; instead the opposite, Grover and the other old "Arctics" repeatedly affirming, that it might be days before the bears would raise the siege, and certainly not till hunger compelled them.

A gloomy forecast—enough to appall us. To stay there for days—even only a couple of them—and in such fashion, would be almost as death. Without food or drink, chilled to the bones, all the while forced to remain upon our legs, with no chance to lie down, or snatch a wink of sleep—a feat impossible!

Foreseeing it thus, as time passed, we became more impatient; till, at length, there was a proposal to "rush the bears"; that is, forsake our perch, and risk the chances of a scattering retreat. The idea was daring, rash, even to recklessness; but it seemed not so to us then, under the torture we were enduring. And most of us had as good as made up our minds to it, when Mr. Ransom called out:

"Wait a bit, boys! I think I know a better way."

"What?" demanded several voices, in tones telling of authority disregarded; as it ever is on occasions of life-danger, where the superior officer has proved himself unequal to cope with it.

"Why, the way back to our boats," he rejoined. "That I hope soon to make safe. Have patience, and you'll see."

After firing the shots that had proved so disas-

trous, the second mate, though first in command of our party, had taken no active steps, and scarce spoken a word. He seemed alike vexed and confused; as if reflecting on the double mistake he had made, with the responsibility that now rested on his shoulders—the failure in our search after-whales undertaken by his advice, and his mistake in sending small shot at the bears, and so tempting them to attack us. Why he had not since used his gun we were all aware, as he had told us. It was for the want of caps. Powder and shot he had in plenty; bullets also, half a dozen of them, but not a percussion-cap! The box containing them he had, by some oversight, left behind in the boat.

As he now counseled us to patience, we kept it as we best could, waiting for and watching him. He was reloading his gun, this time with ball; and what pleased us better, we saw him put caps on the nipples. Fumbling in his pockets, he had found several in some out-of-the-way corner, unsuspected of being there. Enough for present purposes, we could see, all of us knowing that the second mate of the Flying Cloud was a crack shot, as good with gun as with harpoon or whale-lance.

And when he at length raised the double-barrel to his shoulder, we felt sure the siege would also soon be raised, and ourselves set free.

As in point of fact, we soon were. The bright moonlight enabled him to aim true, as though it were in the day; besides, the objects aimed at were within half a dozen lengths of his gun. Then came the two cracks in quick succession; and, when the smoke thinned off below, we saw the old bears lying stretched along the earth, kicking their last kick—the cub alone upon its legs.

In a score of seconds after it too ceased to exist. For the third mate had a "down" upon Polar bears, young and old, and, without pity, impaled it on his whale-spear.

CHAPTER XXI.

HEARTS AND HOPES AT LOWEY.

MR. RANSOM received our united thanks and congratulations for the splendid shots he had made; and we could sincerely as heartily give them, since besides release from our perilous situation by the death of the bears, we had gained something substantial in the way of provender.

The question was, how to cook it, none of us being as yet so hungry as to relish bear-meat raw. Again, the boat-thwarts were thought of, talked about, and in fine torn from their fastenings to be made fuel of. With economy, however, only so many of them as would suffice for cooking a meal being thus utilized.

Despite our sharp-set appetites, it proved but an unpalatable repast—the flesh of the polar bear having a somewhat fishy taste from the nature of its food. Even the hams were anything but relishable, though sugar-cured and with age they might have been better. Those of the American black bear so treated are esteemed a *bonne-bouche*. However, as we had three carcasses to pick and choose from, we selected the tid-bits, chiefly drawing our cheques upon the cub.

The meal was more breakfast than supper, for before we had finished it day began to dapple the eastern sky, and with yellow flecks that promised a bright sunshine. This above all things we desired; for once over the apprehension in which the bears had kept us, with the excitement succeeding, we became the prey to another quite as keen, if not keener. Where was the Flying Cloud?

Somewhere outside the ice-field, of course; but at what point of it? And would she be visible? If not, there was another peril awaiting us, and no ordinary one, as we knew; at least did the older hands. And knowing this, needless to say that soon as there was light enough to make it worth while looking out, all eyes were directed seaward. More than one ascended to the summit of the rock; but first the two mates, taking their telescopes with them.

But no more through glass than by the naked eye could the barque be seen; nothing but the bit of open water inshore; beyond it the belt of ice—now hard-bound, to all appearance—and in the offing beyond this the sea itself, of a greenish-gray, extending north, east, and west, to a horizon which showed neither speck of land nor sail of ship.

Not yet could either be discerned with the sun full up; and failing to sight the barque then was as if a death-blow had been dealt us. No one would wonder at this who could comprehend the nature of our situation. Not all of ourselves understood or realized it, till told. As about the bears, again we "greenhorns" were incredulous of the danger that threatened—even inclined to make light of it. We were on land, and surely safe so far as concerned our lives. If we never set eyes on the barque again, couldn't we make our way to some settlement, civilized or savage, and thence home by one route or another? As for savages, we had heard enough to hinder us from being apprehensive on that score. There were none of fierce or hostile disposition likely to be encountered on that coast.

"Tain't savagers we ha' got to fear, nor think about," said old Groves, entering upon an explanation of our possible dangers. "For myself, I a'most weesh it war. But it ain't, nor anythin' in the shape o' human kind. What's more like to trouble will be not meetin' men o' any sort, nor anymals neyther. Look at that country o' bleak, forbiddin' aspeck, stretchin' ayont eyesight. We mout tramp over it for days an' days 'ithout comin' acrost enough o' eatables to keep life in a cat. B'sides a day's journey w'uldn't amount to much. For hundreds o' miles the groun's jest the same as this round here: part black bog, an' partwise tufts o' sour grass, whar nothin' can make out to live."

The third mate was a born backwoodsman, as his *patois* would prove him; and that conjointly with his

whaling experiences, which included more than one voyage to the Polar Basin, was sufficient to make the rest reliant on his words, without any indorsement by the other old Arctic.

Not long after till every one of us, old as young—new to blubber-hunting, or with a long practice at it—became aware there was likelihood that we might never see ship or home again!

The more we reflected on the chances, the more seemed they against us, taking all the adverse circumstances into account. For there were others besides the ice being closed up, and continuous east and west far as we could see. That troubled us least of all. It was but a belt seaward, and could be cut through, were it worth while making way across it. Which it was not, nor would be, unless the barque were in the offing.

Alas! she was not there, nor likely to be; more than one thing making it improbable. She had been riding at anchor when the three boats rowed away from her, and would so remain to await their return. But only one had returned, and with what a tale to tell! Had the Flying Cloud's first mate been the most hopeful of mariners, it would not be a cheerful one; but being Lige Coffin, too likely it was the opposite. That without any wish on his part to make it more than the reality, as it would seem to him. The last sight he could have had of us was when in the middle of the ice-stream, struggling after him; and, as the channel was then fast closing on himself, he must have taken it for granted our boats had got caught and crushed. Which would be the same as believing every one of us gone to the bottom of the sea; he could have come to no other conclusion, nor reported otherwise to those in the barque.

And what would be the result? As we pondered upon it, our feelings were far from being enviable. And still less to be envied, when the sky again became overcast as it did, and a bank of fog was seen drifting down from eastward; just as on the preceding day, only at an earlier hour—before the sun crossed the meridian line, though we saw not its crossing. Then all was gloom over and around us; our hearts at their heaviest, our hopes at their lowest.

CHAPTER XXII.

A BANNER OF BEARSKIN.

During the rest of that day we kept no look-out, as we could not. The fog hung over land as sea, limiting our view to a circle of less than a score yards diameter; and so continued on into the night, the second we were to spend on that inhospitable shore. But even could our eyes have penetrated it, no advantage would have been gained. The barque was surely herself enveloped by it, and, for her own safety, would be holding to whatever position she was in when it drifted down.

Yet without the slightest chance or possibility of sighting her, we nevertheless listened, in the hope of hearing her signal-gun. Faintest of hopes, now; since we had been listening for it all along. Of course, we heard it not; instead, now and then, the wild, plaintive cry of sea-birds, that seemed singing our death dirge.

The night was again chilly, but we were not compelled, as on that preceding, to pass a portion of it exposed to the keen blasts on the summit of the rock. On the contrary, that incident now contributed to the warmth of more than one, who had converted the bearskins into blankets, the furry side inward. Even the pelt of the cub made one individual comfortable, so far as regarded cold.

Neither on this night did we suffer from hunger; though, as before, it had to be relieved by the sacrifice of our boat-thwarts, others of them torn from their cleats. But we thought less of burning them now; would scarce have cared had it been the oars, or the boats themselves, under the belief, almost a conviction, we should never more need them for their proper purposes.

It had in reality come to that, or near it; one thought alone standing between us and the ultimate tint of despair—this resting on Captain Drinkwater. It may seem odd that at such an hour we should have fixed our only hope on him. Yet so it was, and for reasons easy enough of comprehension. When not in his cups, we knew him to possess superior understanding, with a heart anything but of the despairing kind; instead, he was the last man to cry "hopeless!" Tipsy or sober, all the same, he would cling to hope, and stand by friend or shipmate in distress, no matter what their class or rank. The humblest swab-deck or cook's scullion, washed overboard by a sea, or otherwise endangered, would cause him as much concern as if it were a first-class A. B.; at all events, he would make as much effort to save them.

Reflecting on this, we had no doubt about his doing all that could be done to rescue us. Our fear was his not having faith in the possibility of our being rescued, believing us already at the bottom of the sea.

In this, however, we were wronging him—depreciating his intelligence, as the event proved. But we might be held excusable under the circumstances; all of a day and night without sight or sign of the barque, and now another night the same! A second day with no better result, and some of our party were prepared to give it up, abandon the boats, and do their best to make their way across the water-soaked plains to the Russian settlements of Kamschatka.

But not all talked. I thought of this; a majority still staying true to their belief in Captain Drinkwater. I was myself among the number thus reliant on him, as were both the mates, our officers.

Nor were we disappointed, but all the opposite; as, to our joy, we learned at earliest hour of the

following day. The fog had lifted after midnight, and just as dawn was declaring itself we heard the boom of a great gun—by all recognized as the report of the Cloud's only piece of artillery, carried by her for signaling purposes.

Still more elated were we at seeing herself, as we did soon after. She was out in the offing under sail, but standing easy; evidently examining every inch of the ice-stream, with the open water inshore on its other side.

Among ourselves then it was a moment of wildest excitement, with a rush to the top of the rock; which for some time after presented a tableau almost as quaintly original as when we were besieged on it by the bears, and dancing to keep warmth in our toes.

We danced now again, but to a different tune, and the music of cheerful voices—some loudly shouting in their wild, hysterical delight.

But the older hands took it in a more sober way, more sensible too; as it was not yet certain the barque's people had sighted us; and there was still a possibility they might not, taking into account the distance. We could see the vessel plain enough, but then a man, or a dozen grouped together, were but a speck compared with a ship and her spread sails. Should she fail to discover us and pass on, that would complete the catastrophe, insuring our final abandonment. She would not likely return up coast again; and for us to cut our way out to sea through the ice, and make after her, would be going a wild-goose chase; very madness, the more with our boats well-nigh stripped of their thwarts.

As thought of all this flashed across our minds, it checked the outburst of joyous feeling, bringing some of us back almost to despondency. But the least excited were the ones that now proved most reliable; old Grover taking the lead. Sticking his whale-spear into one of the bearskins, the largest, he ran up the rock with it; and, poising himself on its highest point, held the skin aloft, at longest stretch of arm. The broad disk of white fur, like a flag-of-truce, catching the breeze, and borne out streaming from the staff, formed a conspicuous object, almost sure of being seen from the barque. But the further to insure this, Mr. Ransom was now also on the rock, discharging his double-barrel, shot after shot, fast as he could cram powder into the piece.

Whether the shots were first heard, or their smoke seen, or whether the bearskin did the business, were points we cared not then to speculate upon. Enough for us to know that some of them had success; our joy breaking out in a fresh ebullition as we saw the barque wear suddenly round, take in sail, and lie to in the offing. Our agony was over.

What followed scarce calls for narration, as it can be well conceived without. Even the presence of the vessel there needs little explaining, after what has been said of the man commanding her. It was, as we who knew him best believed, that he would not surrender up hope till the last chances were tried. No more had he, as was now proved, possibly to the saving of our lives.

And in the end we were not called upon to hew out a channel through the ice-stream, though it formed a belt between us and the offing, now frozen fast. Luckily, however, there was a break in it, some little way to the eastward of our position, not seen by us, but noted by the people on the barque as she was bearing down.

Her signals told us to stay where we were; and, but for understanding these, we might have wondered seeing her again give her sails to the wind, and wear off up-coast, as if making away from us.

But she kept that course for only a couple of knots or so; then brought to again, and, as could be perceived, was lowering a boat. This was made out by our officers through their telescopes, who kept reporting to us what followed: the boat parting from the barque, and seemingly rowed through solid ice!

But we were in possession of the key to this apparent mystery; and soon after had explanation of all else, when the first mate of the Flying Cloud, bringing his boat up alongside ours, called out:

"Darn-seize it, shipmates! we thought ye'd all gone to the bottom o' the Polar Basin! Glad to see ye hain't. Jump into your cedars, and follow me. By good luck thar's a crack in the ice eastways that'll let us through to the offing."

We leaped into our boats, need I say with alacrity? And pulling after that of the first mate, though somewhat laboriously for the want of thwarts, we at length once more stood on the decks of the Flying Cloud; every man and boy of us to receive a kind, welcome hand-grasp from her warm-hearted skipper.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN THE WAKE OF A "NOR'-WESTER."

As we were all disappointed with the Polar Basin and the chase of the bowhead whale—Captain Drinkwater himself thoroughly disgusted with both—a change of cruising-ground was determined on.

Bristol Bay, a tract of sea lying northward of the Aleutian or Fox Islands, at the time enjoying considerable celebrity as a whaling ground, was that we meant next making trial of. And so we ran back through Behring's Straits, leaving the Arctic Ocean behind, with only regrets at ever having spread sail upon it.

In the Pacific we hoped to have better luck; and we needed it. For the Flying Cloud's "load-line" stood too high above water to be agreeable to us, her crew—considering that all had an interest in the profits of the voyage.

In fact, we had not taken enough blubber and bone to pay expenses; and, as the season was far advanced, things were looking black, and the "bowhead" whale came in for many an ugly anathema

As hoped for, however, Bristol Bay, turned up trumps, and made good the time frittered away in the Polar Basin. The "right" whale, the true Leviathan, is the species mostly met with in the North Pacific, and we came across them in such numbers, as to keep the Flying Cloud constantly ablaze with the "trying" fires.

We wanted only another whale of respectable size to complete her cargo; and this we soon after sighted, all three boats starting in chase of it, respectively commanded by the first, second, and third mates.

I was again along with Mr. Ransom, acting as "tub-oarsman;" and this ambitious young officer, eager as ever to prove his superiority in the chase of Leviathan, urged us, his subordinates, to do our best with the oars. He even promised to pay us something out of his own pocket, should we outstrip the other boats, and let him have the chance to fling first harpoon.

Of course, we did our best, and succeeded in giving him the coveted opportunity. Forging ahead of the first and third boats, we brought him within harpoon range of the chased *cetacean*, into which he hurled the barbed iron, burying it deep.

A fierce, vicious "Nor'-wester" the whale was; anything but disposed to show us play. Instead, it tore off through the water at race-horse speed, direct to windward; so that, with all our strength and rowing skill, we were barely able to keep pace with it. The other boats fell rapidly behind; and so far that, after a short while, we completely lost sight of them, only seeing them at intervals for a second or two, as they rose on the combing of the waves. For the sea was rough, with a sky overhead which threatened to make it more so.

But Mr. Ransom regarded neither sea nor sky; and no more now the boats our consorts, seeing them distanced beyond the power of rivalry. The barque was still in sight, lying to under reefed sails, and that was enough for him. Even when the last spot of her canvas disappeared below the water-line, and we could barely make out her main royal mast, with its rigging slight and thin as the gossamer threads of a spider's web, he would not consent to our parting from the harpooned whale, that still hurried us along as if towed by a fast steamer. Not even when the boat-steerer, Grummell, made appeal to him, in words of warning, about the risk he was running.

"As ye see, sir," said the old whalesman, in respectful remonstrance, "it's nigh upon night, an' the barque's top-mast spars all but invisible. If we lose sight o' her it'll be awkward. Don't you think we'd better cut loose?"

"I won't cut loose!" returned the young officer, in tones of obstinate determination. "Not till the Cloud's main-trunk is the only thing we can see of her. Hang it, Grummell! how could we let this whale give us the slip, now we're so near to lancin' him! Look! By the way he behaves I know he'll soon bring to."

"With due respect, sir," returned Grummell, "he ain't a bit like bringin' to. By his behavior, I'd say all o' the contrary! He seems to ha' the strength for leadin' us a long chase yet. Look at him now! Look how he goes!"

A fresh spurt on the part of the whale it was that called forth the final exclamation, the great *cetacean* rushing on at increased speed, after a puff from his spiracles, sending the spray so high in air that the wind spit it back into our faces.

The young officer looked over his shoulder, his face assuming an expression of anxiety, as he saw the barque's mastheads almost down to the sky-line. A conflict of emotions was going on in his mind—a regret to give up the game chased and so near to capture, and the danger of following it further.

"I always hate to cut loose from a whale," he said, in a tone of extreme vexation; "and never more than this one—after so nicely fixing it. I know I could 'muckle' him, if he'd only give me the ghost of a chance."

This the whale seemed determined not to do. Instead, rushed unflaggingly on, our light boat dancing on in its wake, splitting the seas with her sharp cutwater faster than any oars could drive her.

Once more the second mate cast a glance backward, and another up to the sky; then taking out his boat-knife, said despondingly:

"There's no help for it, I suppose. We mustn't risk losing sight of the ship, with the sun so near down. You see how it is, boys?" he added, interrogatively, as if apologizing for what he was about to do. "We must let Leviathan off this time. Heigh! What's that?" he exclaimed, casting a last look over the sea. "A fog coming on! can it be?"

We all turned our eyes in the same direction as his; to see a bluish haze beginning to form over the water, to windward, but floating down toward us, and rapidly.

"Fair that an' nothin' else," exclaimed the steerer, in tone of alarm. "Do cut, sir! Cut quick!"

The young officer no longer hesitated, but with a single stroke of his keen blade severed the line; when the whale, as if in triumphant glee at being released from the painful drag upon him, struck the water a thundering blow with his flat, ponderous flukes, and, sounding, vanished from our sight!

"Lay round, Grummell!" commanded the mate; "give me the mast and sail. Hold on! The compass first, and let us fix the bearing of the barque! Hurry up with it!"

The little boat compass was pulled out from under the stern-sheets, and soon as possible. For all, he was too late with it; before he could open the box and get the card steadied to set bearings, the fog enveloped us, leaving a visible horizon of less than three-score yards. As a guide the compass was of little more use now than a log-slate with its entries

The Chase of Leviathan.

rubbed out. True, it would tell us north from south, and east from west, but not in which quarter the barque lay.

"Oars, boys!" came the mate's command. "Give way! quick, and with a will. We can't do better than pull straight to leeward; as you'll remember the whale's been bringing us up wind. If this confounded fog had only held off till I'd got the ship's bearings! But it hasn't, and so we're in a fix."

"A durnationed fix, sir!" confirmed the boat-steerer, "an' no mistake. For myself, I don't remember ever bein' in much o' a worse. Old Nick take the ugly thing!"

The men were not unaccustomed to hear fogs thus bitterly anathematized, and more especially those of that same sea. In the higher latitudes of the Pacific Ocean they are among the dangers most dreaded by whalesmen, not only on account of their frequency, but the suddenness with which they shut down; coming on and over, as it were, in an instant. And it is impossible to say how long they may continue; the oldest cruisers cannot tell this, all experience being baffled in predicting their duration.

Aware of this, we could fully comprehend our danger, and did. Feeling it the greater, as no other vessel, whaling or otherwise, had been within sight of us for days, and our only chance of safety lay in finding our own. That now of the slimmest; since to the direction she was in we had neither clew nor guide, save such as the wind gave us. And this being capricious, it might at any moment veer round to another quarter, but to mislead us.

Only those similarly circumstanced have a just idea of the peril in which we were placed. We ourselves had it, in its very fullest realization, as we silently worked at the oars. And, as if to render our sense of isolation more complete, with that of despondency the keener, night's darkness soon after settled down over the sea, with a gloom that seemed palpable to the touch!

CHAPTER XXIV.

GROPPING THE WAY.

It is difficult to describe, and still more to comprehend, by one who has never experienced it, the peculiar sensation of being beset by a thick sea-fog, at night and in an open boat. Even during daylight, and on board a strong ship, if not actually causing fear, it imbues the mind with a sense of insecurity subversive of all estimates and calculations.

But as we were then in our cockle-shell of a craft, midway in a wide ocean, literally wandering upon it, with no certain point to steer for, and just as likely to take the wrong direction as the right one, it begot within us a feeling of bewilderment altogether indescribable. Though with oars in our hands, and well able to use them, we played them gropingly about, as one might his arms in the game of blind man's buff.

"Heave up, and rest, boys!" our commander at length called to us. "Get out the lantern, that I may have a squint at the compass before this wind dies out. It looks as if we're going to have a flat calm. Keep all your ears open for a gun, and if you hear one, mark well the direction."

A keg containing a lantern, with the materials for making a light, is part of the inventory of every whale-boat. These were instantly produced, the light struck and brought to bear on the compass-card, which the mate held in his hand; the same shining on his face, showed an expression there, if possible, more troubled than before, for at the first glance the position of the needle to the course of the wind told him the latter had changed since he last read its direction—the very wind we were trusting to, the only thing we could trust, having proved treacherous.

"This won't do," he said, in half-muttered soliloquy, on detecting the error. "It's no use thinking about the wind any longer, and we may as well try what good can be got out of the compass without it. The barque ought to bear about nor'-nor'-west from us. What's your opinion of it, Grummell?"

"Tain't possible to hev any opeenyun, sir," was the discouraging answer. "But I s'pose we may's well do that as anythin' else."

"Let's try it, then!" said the young officer, decisively. "Full ahead, boys! I'll keep you to a count."

At which, he took the lantern from the boat-steerer, leaving the latter to return to his special duty, while the rest of us in silent obedience once more resumed stroke.

Never were oars worked with less heart or hope. We pulled mechanically, having but the faintest belief we should reach the barque that night, if ever. The least experienced of us knew that, whether now on the right course for her or not, the deviation of a single point of the compass—even but a hair's breadth—would soon carry us wide away from it. So that, with or without the aid of the magnetic needle, it was groping our way all the time.

None knew this better than the second mate himself; and though he muttered occasional directions to the steerer, taking them from the compass, the tone of his voice told he had but slight faith in it. No more bad we, the rowers, in our oars; keeping them out of water for lengthened spells, so that their plunge might not hinder our hearing the signal gun. Our commander was listening for it as well; and instead of reproofing us for careless pulling, as we might have expected, he after a time ordered us to suspend stroke altogether.

Once more we lay rocked about upon the billows, with ears set to catch the wished-for sound; keenly set as those of a man upon trial, awaiting the verdict that may leave him life or condemn him to ignominious death. At first we heard but the wash of the water, with now and then the wild shriek of a seabird possibly as ourselves, confused by the fog, and straying in its flight.

It was a period of painful suspense with us, as it had been ever since we came to realize the fact of our being lost—cast away in mid-ocean. All the more joyous were we on hearing, as we at length did, that signal so long listened for in vain. It produced a revision of feeling so exhilarating as to call forth a general cheer. But not universal. To our surprise one refrained joining in it, old Grummell, the boat-steerer.

"What's the matter, Grummell?" asked the mate, seeing him unmoved and silent, while the lantern's light showed his features wearing the same grave expression as ever. "You heard the gun, didn't you?"

"Course I heerd it, sir, same's the rest o' ye. But it needs somethin' besides that 'fore we can feel safe. I defy any one to tell the quarter it comded from. I can't."

His words were but too true, as after a moment's reflection we all perceived. In our delight at hearing the sound, it had not occurred to us to think of the direction.

We now did, with hearts down again, almost low as ever. For on comparing notes no two agreed about it; one thinking it on the port bow, another on the starboard quarter, a third stern, and a fourth dead ahead! With such wide diversity of views, taking in every point of the compass, no sure movement could be made one way or the other; and we continued riding the waves without stroke of oar, in hopes to hear the gun again.

Again we heard it; a dull, muffled boom, as if a thick wall was interposed between us and it, deadening the sound. And as before, with the same contrariety of opinion as to the quarter whence it came.

Mr. Ransom believed it northward, near the point for which we had been of late steering. So, with eyes to the compass again, he commanded the boat to be pulled in that course.

This was done, with as little noise of oarstroke as possible; all ears on the alert to catch that sound we liked better to hear, however much we were mystified about its direction.

But not for long did we keep a northerly course, scarce a single minute; for the barque was firing minute guns; and the next heard led our commander to doubt that we were rowing the right way. The very contrary he thought now; and so it was "boat about," and a spell of pulling, as it were, backward!

This continued only till another boom broke over the watery waste, again giving us reason to change course. But with no better result. After awhile all remained uncertain as ever.

There was one more detonation from the gun—at least but one reached our ears—fainter and less distinct than any which had preceded. I told the sad, disheartening tale that, instead of the barque drawing nearer to us, or we to her, the distance between was but widening. And what chance was there of our making it less, ignorant as we were of the course to be run?

After pulling for some time longer in a heartless, half-bewildered way, our commander cried out, in a vexed tone of voice:

"Peak oars! The boat's been going round like a spin-button, till I hardly know her head from her stern. It's plain we're not nearing the barque anyhow; instead, getting further away from her. So, lay by again, and let's listen. It's no use shooting about, grasshopper fashion, as we've been doing."

Needless to say we obeyed the order; and, peaking oars as directed, sat silent on the thwarts, every ear acutely bent to catch the report of cannon.

None reached us after; only noises of another kind, all in their way disagreeable. And something more, for they all pointed to one and the same thing, which threatened still further to imperil us. The sea-birds shrieking wilder, the wind beginning to howl, the water's wash rising higher, and sounding harsher, were the too sure forecasts of a gale.

Hitherto it had been only a fresh breeze, but all the signs now portended storm—a very tempest.

And to face it we had nothing that could be depended upon—only a thin shell of cedar board between us and the sea's bottom—between us and certain death.

CHAPTER XXV.

LOOKING TO THE GULLS FOR GUIDANCE.

One of the peculiarities of a thick sea-fog—'nd a most dangerous one for a boat that has become separated from its ship—is the difficulty of telling from what point sounds proceed. About this the most practiced ear is at fault; as we had good reason to know from our experiences of the night, with others gained elsewhere, and at an earlier time. So long, therefore, as the fog lasted, it would be at best but blind guessing, and idle to go zigzagging about as we had been doing; indeed worse, since it was wearisome work at the oars. We, the rowers, were already tired enough tugging at them, and glad to rest, when our commander, reflecting in this wise, after a while called out to the boat-steerer:

"Grummell! I think we may as well hold on here; keep her well to the wind!"

So we lay with oars apeak, head to the wind's eye. But listening longer for the gun signals was on our part more involuntary than intentional. Discouraged by having so often heard them without gaining aught by it, we supposed it would be the same again.

As the anticipated storm did not come on as soon as expected, and for the time we had to deal with but a stiff blow, two of the oars were shipped, the other two now end then dipping into the water to keep the boat steady. And as by this we were all very hungry, thirsty as well, we bethought us of satisfying both appetites. We had the wherewithal: several pounds of "hard-tack" in a canvas bag, and

a keg containing about five gallons of water, with rum enough to make grog of it; much more of all than was needed for a single repast. But though our appetites were sharp enough to make it a big one, our commanding officer put restraint on their cravings, giving good reasons therefor.

"Shipmates," he said, addressing us in the familiar phraseology of the sea, "there's no knowing how long we may have to live on the contents of this bag and keg. You see what they are—hardly sufficient to keep the life in us for three days. If before that the barque don't turn up, or we haven't the luck to fall in with some other vessel, I needn't tell you, 'twill be tight times with us."

Thus admonished, the meal we made was as light as the fare itself was meager; our supplies being diminished no further than the twin calls of hunger and thirst absolutely required. For this abstemiousness Mr. Ransom needed no stern assertion of authority. As himself, we all knew the importance of husbanding what might be for days our only resource.

The anchorish repast over, and all else made snug as was possible under the circumstances, we took steps for passing the remainder of the night. It was arranged that three of the six should go to sleep, or try to; the other three staying awake to look after the safety of the craft. Then, after a certain time had elapsed, the sleepers and watchers to change place and purpose.

By good luck we had our pea-jackets with us—not all, but as many as sufficed to make a wrap for the sleepers. And they were needed to keep them warm; for although it was yet summer, and the latitude below 50 deg., the night had turned icy cold.

Little slept any of us on either watch; though we were not kept awake by the cold, so much as through anxiety about what the morning's light might reveal to us.

Alas! when morning came it revealed nothing; the fog still enveloped us, dense as ever. We only knew of the sun having arisen by its yellower hue; but for sight of distant sea or sky, it was still the same. Our field of view was limited to a circle of less than a cable's length.

Yet, despite the continued obscurity, there was that in the morning air—a something which revived hopes within us—again leading us to listen for the ship's signals.

And again we heard them, several times in succession; at each booning reverberation setting the boat's head, as we supposed, toward it; and pulled straight and hard, till the next seemed to come from behind, telling us we were rowing the wrong way!

It was vexatiously aggravating, and after countless shoots and roundings, with oar-work to weary out the best paid waterman, we at length again lay to, the mate commanding it. Unfortunately there was no reason why he should order otherwise; for after that no guns were heard to guide us—blind guides as they had proved.

Our ears failing, our sole ultimate hope now must be in our eyes; these useless so long as the fog continued. Should it not clear off, we might as well shut them, and go to sleep.

But we were not in the mood for sleep, however much needing it. Anxiety forbade that, and we watched the mist with eager earnestness, hoping to see it become thinner, vainly endeavoring to penetrate its clammy curtain, white and weird as the canopy of a death-bed; peered through, and speculated upon it, comparing notes of what each thought of it, whether likely to lift or lie on.

"It's liftin' now!" at length spoke a voice, recognizable as that of the boat-steerer, adding; "Wait a bit, boys, an' ye'll see no end o' cl'ar ocean around. Let's hope we may also git sight o' the barque!"

Grummell's prediction proved right, but his hope the reverse. For soon after, the fog was rolled up like a scroll, to its last straggling rag, and disappeared from the surface of the sea, leaving it bright and blue as the sky above. Still, round all the horizon's ring there was no sign of barque, nor ship; no sail of any sort; our tiny craft, a mere speck, seeming the only thing to tell of human kind afloat on the waters of Bristol Bay.

The short-lived joy with which we had hailed the lifting of the fog was succeeded by a feeling akin to despair. For bright though the sky now over us, our prospects were darker than ever. So long as we saw nothing there had been hope, with the chances that something might be seen—the barque herself. After hearing her minute guns throughout the night, this was probable enough.

But from that time we heard them no more, nor could we desry aught that resembled the rigging of a ship—not a spar.

Mr. Ransom was the tallest of us, and mounting to the "clumsy cleft," steadyng himself by the warp, with telescope to his eye, took a last survey of the ocean around; while we, with hearts beating anxiously, awaited the result.

They beat despairingly, painfully, when we saw him drop down to the thwart again, his features all clouded, saying, as he returned to his seat:

"The barque isn't in sight, boys; neither she nor aught else."

Grummell took the glass and tried, too. Though a man of more than mature age, we knew the boat-steerer to be sharp-sighted, to a marvel. So we again underwent a spell of anxious anticipation; but as before to greater disappointment.

"Neery thing!" was his laconic but expressive report, as, shutting up the telescope with a conclusive slap, he returned to take his place at the steering gear.

For some time we sat gazing in one another's faces, with a hopeless, half-wildered look. The boat lay dead upon the water, for the oars were now shipped, and though the mast was stepped, no sail had as yet

been hoisted. Wherefore should we work oar, or spread canvas? To do either seemed equally useless; for still, as ever, the chances of pulling or sailing on the right course would be hundreds to one *against us*.

It was a crisis in which nothing rational could be depended on, and no experience meet; one of those occasions when men are most disposed to fall back upon destiny, and give way to a belief in omens. Thinking of what we ought to do—that is the point we should steer to—Grummell suggested our being *guided by the gulls!*

"How? In what way?" demanded Mr. Ransom, who, as the rest of us, wondered what the old whaleman could mean. We knew him as a man strongly addicted to faith in the supernatural; had this to do with his suggestion?

"By followin' the course o' thar flight, sir," he said, answering the mate's question, "and turnin' in the same direckshun."

"That would be steering to every point of the compass at one and the same time," objected the young officer. "Don't the gulls fly every way?"

"Not allers, sir. An' let's hope they ain't doing so now. We'll soon see."

Saying which, he bent his eyes upon the sea, or, rather the belt of sky above, taking survey of it on every side.

There were gulls winging their way around the boat, several, and of more than one species, their flight apparently in no particular direction. Instead, they kept going and coming, meeting and crossing, now poised, and making plunges at the finny tribe; anon rising, to soar aloft again.

After watching them for a time, the boat-steerer gave it up, saying, as the shadow came back over his brow:

"No; the barque ain't near, nor ship o' any sort."

"How can you tell that?" asked the mate, speaking all our minds, for we were still mystified as to what Grummell meant.

"Easy enough," answered the old whaleman; then proceeding to the explanation. Which proved, after all, to be no fanciful theory nor superstitious belief on his part, but a simple natural fact.

"Ye know, sir, the gulls an' most other sorts o' sea-birds have a habit of follerin' ships to catch the scraps now and then chuck'd overboard; so when they sight a vessel, naturally they make to 'rds her. If thar was one near us now, they'd be goin' her way—leastwise a good many o' them. But they ain't; 'stead floppin' all about to and fro. More's the pity, showin' there ain't a sail in sight."

His reasoning was irresistible; convincing, while saddening us all. Clearly were we alone on the wide, trackless ocean, no better off than castaways who had escaped from a wrecked vessel. Nay, not so well as many; for our stock of provisions was less than might have been secured by these in the most hurried departure from an abandoned ship.

"Well, boys," said our young commander, after an interval of despondent silence, "you see how it is—an ugly look-out for us. It's a toss-up which way we steer now, or whether we steer at all. Still, by lying-to here nothing's likely to be gained; and, as there's a breeze, we may as well run before it. At all events, it'll save elbow grease, and may carry us in sight of something."

To the suggestive proposal there was no protest. Coming from our superior officer, it was the same as a command. But, without this construction, we were all willing and ready to yield obedience to it. The more since it called for no laborious exertion on our part; it was only to hoist the sail and attend to it—an easy task.

"If we see nothing before night," added the mate, after reflecting a moment, "then I've made up my mind as to what we had best do."

Without questioning what, we slung up the canvas; and, sheeting it home, ran on without regard to other course than that in which the capricious wind might carry us.

For the rest of that day, every hour, minute, moment of it, our eyes were on the alert to deservy sail. Land we did not look for, knowing there was none within less than a hundred leagues.

But again the sun went down over the wide waste of ocean, without our seeing ship or sheet of canvas—much less that of the Flying Cloud.

CHAPTER XXVI.

LET'S RUN FOR THE "FOXES!"

"WELL!" exclaimed our commander, declaring the intention he had given hint of on our hoisting sail, "we must alter the course. As the compass tells me, we've been all day running nor'-westward. That won't do, if we look to making land. Having surely lost ship, land's our only hope now, and due south our likeliest chance for reaching it. We must strike the Aleutian Islands—if we can. What's your opinion, Grummell?" he added, in deference to the old whaleman.

"I see no better way, sir," answered the steerer. "Fact none so good as to make for the Lewshans. As ye say, they oughter be 'bout south from hyar, an' if this wind'll only keep to the quarter it's in now, we may reach 'em easy enuf; that air purvidin' we kin hold out ag'in' the hunger an' thirst. B'sides, thar's the chance o' fallin' in wi' some o' the whale craft we see'd cruisin' about in the Bay. Most o' 'em shed be full afore this, an' steerin' home'ards; in the which case thar'll be a fairish prospect for us to git picked up."

"It's just a question of whether we should lie to and wait for another morning," rejoined the young officer, appearing to reflect. "And yet no!" he added, after a moment, in determined tone. "There's no question about it. We must be off the whaling-ground long ago, fifty miles or more, and are as like to fall in with a ship further south as by dilly-dallying about here. Besides, there'd be the

lost time. Let's run for the Foxes, then. You're all agreed to it, boys?"

We had no right to say nay. He was our commander, and could order the boat steered in whatever direction seemed best to him. But under circumstances like those we were then in—a matter of life or death to all—authority becomes relaxed, and the humblest subordinate has a claim to be heard. Independent of this, however, the young officer, kind-hearted as he was rash, would have made the concession.

"We're all agreed to it," was the response he got from us, speaking as one man.

Just at that moment, as if to indorse the design upon which we were in such complete accord, the wind shifted several points, and was now blowing, as the compass told, nearly direct from the north.

"A good omen!" exclaimed our commander. "Let's believe it that anyhow, and lose no time in taking advantage of it. Set her head south! Up sail again!"

During the twenty minutes or so spent in irresolution, we had let the canvas down, leaving the boat to toss about as though no one was in her.

Now all became changed, the thought of a new departure inspiring us with fresh hopes. Up went the sail, every inch spread, and sheeted home, quick as a flash of lightning, while with Grummell steering, the boat's head swung round with like prompt rapidity.

"Now for the Foxes!" cried the mate, cheerily, as the sail caught the favoring breeze, and we went in surging rush through the water. "They *must* be straight south," he added, "and we can't miss them."

It was pleasant to think so; yet was there something in the tone of the young officer's voice which told us he was far from confident as to the direction of the Aleutian or Fox Islands, and was but speaking "the wish father to the thought."

Had the clerk of the weather given us the setting of the wind for ourselves, we could not have wished it to blow from a better quarter. We wanted to run due south, and it was *not* due north. Instead, several points from it, just enough to strike us on the quarter, filling the sail, and keeping all steady. And strong enough was it to put the boat to her best speed, good eight knots an hour. At this rate she went dashing on, leaving in her wake a foaming, luminous track; the sea through which we sailed being full of the phosphorescent *meduse*.

For over an hour we had been making good way, when there came an interruption from a source hitherto unthought of. The light in our lantern went suddenly out, from the oil having become exhausted. An odd reason, it might be supposed, for staying the course of a boat under sail. Nor would it be any, were she running without regard to direction. But we were aiming to go south, with no other guidance than the compass; and what availed the magnetic needle without light to show us how it pointed? Had it been a watch, and we only wanting to know the time of the night, we might have got that by groping at the hands; but the more delicate and volatile thread of steel, imbued with loadstone, shrinks from such manipulation, and cannot be coaxed to stand steady. It was of no more use to us now than would have been a dilapidated sundial.

In this our dilemma, the boat was again brought to by the mate's orders, till something might be thought of likely to relieve us from it. Was there anything of which we could make a light? Had anybody any matches?

No, not one; there was not a single lucifer left!

"We must trust to the wind, then," said our commander, letting the compass slide down at his feet. "Set round again, and run on; you look to the sail, Grummell, and give me the steering oar."

Soon as the two had shifted places, away we went again, now trusting altogether to the wind for our course, though we knew how little this could be relied on, and nowhere less than in the North Pacific. It might change abruptly, and at any moment, just as it had done but the hour before.

We were thinking only of its caprice, as regarded direction; but ere another hour passed this was as nothing to us. Then little cared we whence it blew or whither it bore us, all our thoughts being engrossed, all our energies called into action for the saving of our boat, and, I need not add, ourselves. For that breeze, late so favorable, had just freshened to a strong wind, and, constantly increasing, threatened a gale of the most violent kind—a very tempest. It was that we had been fearing all along, and hoped to have escaped. But no, it was on us now.

"We must send before it," called out the mate, "blow what way it will. A reef in the sail, Grummell!"

The reef was taken in with all dispatch, but soon again came the command, "Another reef in!" and not long after the third and last had to be taken up, till but a mere patch of canvas remained spread. Still the boat rolled off before the fast-following seas, while a murky, angry sky scowled above our heads.

To add to our embarrassment, as our discomfort, it had become keenly cold. The wind, rushing direct down from the Pole over a vast wilderness of snow and ice, struck against our backs chill as if loaded with sleet, and we had only our ordinary pea-jackets for protection. This, however, but that it embarrassed us in the action required for the management of our craft, would have been a matter of secondary concern. It was as nothing compared with others soon engaging us, all our efforts being called upon to keep the boat from getting swamped by the surging seas. Fast as the sail drove her forward, one of them every now and then overtook her, sending its shower of brine over and ahead of us. Every spare

hand was busied bailing out, hard and constant, with such vessels as chanced to be at our service. Otherwise she would have filled and sunk; indeed, we knew not when the boat might go down. Still, we toiled on, and succeeded in keeping her afloat.

Though short the night, as in the summer of these high latitudes, it seemed long enough to us; we thought day was never going to dawn. But it did at length, delighting our eyes; though only for a brief moment, until survey had been made of the surrounding sea. First our commander made it stand on the "clumsy cleft," and turning his telescope to all sides. And when all were examined he stepped down again, saying in despondent tone:

"Shipmates, I'm sorry to report nothing in sight!"

An interval of silence succeeded, all gloom as before. It was broken by Mr. Ransom adding:

"You give a look around, Grummell. Two pairs of eyes may be better than one. Take the glass."

The old whaleman mounting up made a series of observations similar to those gone through by the mate. But with no better result, as we learnt by his saying:

"Can't see nothin', sir, 'ceptin' the waves, an' that white combin'. We must be cl'ar off the cruisin' groun', an' suthart o' all the whalin' ships, long ago."

Having thus disappointingly delivered himself, he dropped down again, resuming his seat on the thwart.

Another interregnum of silence, as before broken by the mate calling out to me:

"Macy! You've got sharp eyes, I know. Take the telescope and see if *you* can make out anything."

Without vanity, I may say that Nature has endowed me with unusual power of vision, of which Mr. Ransom had more than once availed himself when out with his boat in pursuit of Leviathan.

Flattered by the command, I was soon upon the cleft, and with the telescope to my eye sweeping the horizon around.

For a time I saw but the big waves, surging and tumbling about in chaotic confusion. At first I looked over them afar, along the rugged line of their crests; then depressing the telescope, examined the sea in closer proximity.

Nothing there either, I concluded, reporting so to my comrades in the boat below. In fact, I was about to give it up, as the others had done, when an object caught my eye which caused me to cling to the mast a little longer. Only a block of wood it was, floating buoy-like; a small thing which would have, no doubt, escaped my observation but for its turning up conspicuously on the smooth ridge of a swell.

"You see something, Macy?" called the mate to me, while I was endeavoring to make out whether the bit of driftwood was what at first glance I had taken it for. "What is it?" he added.

"I think it's a *drug*, sir."

"A drug! By Jove! there's something in that. Whereaway is it?"

"On the port bow, sir; about three cables' length off."

"Give the steering directions, then, and I'll bring the boat down on it!"

I did as ordered, without much altering the course; for the waif was but a point or two out of it to leeward. And soon we were close up to the bit of bobbing timber, to see it was a *drug*, sure enough, the letters branded upon it showing this.

CHAPTER XXVII.

FAST TO A SUNKEN WHALE.

The uninitiated may need telling that a "drug" is one of the implements of the whaleman's calling, its purpose to proclaim ownership. When a whale has been killed and must be temporarily abandoned, either for continuing the chase of the "school," or other like reason, it is usual to fling out the drug, which is simply a block of light wood, with the ship's name and the port from which she hails branded upon it. The little flag hoisted on the dead whale is but a beacon to guide the boat back to it, while the drug has a significance somewhat different. It is as a brand upon cattle, to tell all who may find them straying, that they are owned, and who is their owner. Many a whale, after capture, has to be left drifting about for days, till its captors have an opportunity of returning to it. Not unfrequently they never return at all. A fog coming over the place, or a storm suddenly arising, may make it impossible to retrieve the stricken game, however valuable. But whether recovered by its legitimate owners or not, the drug says "hands off," to the crew of any other boat or ship that may chance to fall in with it—a rule, or law, of the profession, rigorously observed on all whaling grounds.

"The Highlander, Aberdeen," said our commander, spelling off the name on the block, as a wave turned its lettered side upward. "Why, that's the Scotch vessel we saw in the Polar Basin. She must have left it like ourselves, and come southward. But what's one of her *drugs* doing here drifting about? Dropped overboard, I suppose, by some accident."

"It may be fast to a sunken whale, sir," suggested Grummell.

"It may be," rejoined the mate; "and, by the way it works, most likely is—fast to something. We'll soon see."

By this the bit of timber was close enough to be caught hold of; and, leaning over, he lifted it out of the water.

Sure enough there was a line attached to it; at first slack, but as our boat was borne on by the wind, it became taut, so suddenly as to jerk the block out of the young officer's hands, with a plashing rebound, back into the sea.

"Ship oars! Stern all!" were the orders to us intrusted with the rowing. Which we promptly obeyed, laying the boat once more alongside the floating waif.

Taken in hand again, and now more cautiously manipulated, it was found to be fast indeed; so fast as to bear any pull we might put upon it. All our boat's weight, with the force of the wind and surging sea, failed to fetch it away.

"There's a whale at the other end, sure," said the mate. "And the Highlander must have been here or hereabouts not so very long ago; else it would be back up again. What do you think, Grummell?"

"I think the same's yourself, sir; that there's a fish at the other end o' that line."

One of old Grummell's idiosyncrasies was the calling a whale a *fish*; contrary to all the rules and ideas of the zoologist.

"An' it can't a' been so long below," he added, "elsewise, as you say, sir, it would a' riz to the surface, sure sartin. The Scotch ship must a' good over this groun' within the week, an' maybe she's still on it."

Words that reawakened hope within us; and once more our eyes were turned upon the sea, with glances of interrogation.

Only to get answer as before; nothing there but the waves in the same wild commotion, and dreary monotony.

Returning to the drug, our commander said:

"Some luck in our coming across this, anyhow. It'll keep the boat steady, and we must hold onto it. Let us hope 'twill bear the strain."

Without further words the piece of timber was lifted into the boat, and a turn or two of the line taken around a stanchion. After which we rode "short up and down," anchored, as we believed, to the body of a sunken whale.

Still in fear of the line parting from the heavy pull upon it, we kept veering and hauling; at the same time beat on another piece, low down as possible, to act as a "preventer," taking every precaution against its chafing.

"It will be safer for us to ride here, head to the sea, than run," said the mate, in justification of the course he intended taking. "As you all see, the gale hasn't yet got to its highest—not near it. There's but hills around us now—they'll be mountains before the wind goes down again."

This we could well believe, seeing every sign of it. Scowling sky and waves wildly raging; the storm-petrel darting about as in delight; were all indications that the blast already strong would be stronger ere it blew itself out.

We were not long at our odd anchorage before finding out the good service it did us. The boat rode well upon the waves, and we took every care to keep her trim with head right to the wind. Our only anxiety was about the line standing the strain.

It did, thank God! And for such a length of time that we no longer despaired of it; indeed, began to feel cheerful, after a fashion. For there seemed at least a chance of our outliving the gale, whatever might come after.

To encourage us in this hope, our commander, all along depressed by the thought of having been the cause of our misfortunes—as in truth was he—said, with an air of light concern evidently assumed:

"I wonder what's the depth here? It can't be very great with a drug's line reaching the surface—that in a slant, too. Suppose we sound and see. In a way it may be worth while."

No one objecting, steps were taken to ascertain the soundings. A codfish line chanced to be in the boat, which we had been using but a few days before; Bristol Bay being a fishing-ground for cod, not surpassed by the Banks of Newfoundland.

"Forty-seven fathoms!" called out the mate, after throwing over the lead, and looking to the line-marks. "Not so deep but that this whale might be saved if a ship had good hold on him, and the weather at all favorable. Well, let's hope, mates, our hold won't fetch away. And I don't think it will—no fear of it."

His attempt at being cheerful was belied by the tone of his voice; this betraying apprehension, as we could all perceive. And no wonder. For the gale was now piping louder and harder, our situation becoming every moment more perilous. The short chopping swell raised by the wind, as it stirred up the sea, tossed our little craft to and fro as an empty egg-shell; while the water combing in over the bows kept us constantly bailing as for dear life. But we knew it would have been worse with the boat running before it, and so kept to our old anchorage as the only means of chance of safety.

It stood us in good stead; for we succeeded in clinging to it despite every effort of wind and wave to dislodge us; held on to it throughout the rest of that day, and into the night. But not far into the night, before there came a change in our favor, due to an incident unexpected as singular.

The apathy of despair had settled down upon us as the darkness over the deep, for we had still but slight hope of being able to withstand the tempest till morning. We were all dead-wearied bailing out the boat which made water fast as ever. So hopeless, indeed, that some were half inclined to leave off, and let things take their course. Fatal it would have been had we not persisted. But just as we had reached the yielding point arose the incident I have spoken of as singular. It was announced by our commander crying out:

"The line's slackened, and we're drifting to leeward! It's either parted or we've drawn the iron. God help us, if we have!" he added, in a tone of increased apprehension.

"I don't think it's that, sir," said Grummell. "More like the whale's fetched away, an's comin' up. I've knowned o' sich a thing afore."

"Gather in the slack, and see!" commanded the mate.

We clutched at the drug-line, and con...ed hauling in. But before we had made half-a-dozen hands over hand, the voice of the old whalersman

again broke upon our ears, now in joyous exclamation:

"Hurrah! jest as I sayed it was. Thar he comes up, high an' dry!"

Looking to windward, we saw an immense dark mass, which we knew to be a whale's body, springing suddenly up, till it stood half its own bulk above the surface; while our ears were saluted by a series of loud snaps like the cracking of whips, with a hissing between as of steam making escape!

The rising of the whale was, of course, due to natural causes. Dead for some days, it had become partly decomposed, and rendered lighter by the generated gases, till its buoyancy at length overcame the weight of the superincumbent water, and brought it up. The agitation of the sea with the force exerted by our boat bearing on the drug-line, had no doubt hastened its upheaval; at first slow, but with increased velocity, till it was tossed to the surface with sudden abruptness, as a volcanic island upcast by latent forces from below.

Unquestionably it was the saving of us, as but for it our frail craft was surely doomed to destruction. It came in the "nick of time," too; for, on the instant after, three tremendous seas swept over the spot, one of which would have engulfed us.

We need have no fear now, boys!" spoke the mate, in a tone of cheerfulness no longer counterfeit. "The whale will give us a *slip*, in which we may ride safe as in Bedford harbor. See how it's smoothed round us already."

Such was the fact, understandable to all of us. It was literally as "oil pourin' on the troubled waters," the oleaginous excretion from the half-decomposed carcass floating off leeward, and forming a list of comparatively smooth water, wider than the body of the great cetacean itself. Over this enchanted ground the seas no longer broke, scarce venturing within its limits; and though still raging around with unabated fury, winds howling and waves roaring as ever, we could now listen to them with less fear, almost with equanimity. Still less regarded we the shrieking of the sea-birds, hitherto seeming ominous of an evil fate, though they were now in greater numbers around us; some perched upon the whale, others settled down in the *slip*—as ourselves, for shelter. No more recked we of the chill hyperborean blasts, nor that odor of aught but Arabi borne by them to our nostrils. It was a stench that, under other circumstances, might have been intolerable, unendurable. But not so to us there and then, who had reason to endure, almost delight in it; knowing that the putrid mass from which it emanated, between us and the wind, was, possibly, the only thing between us and a watery grave.

"It has proved a perfect godsend," pronounced Grummell, after seeing how it insured our safety. "And, sir," he added, addressing himself to the mate, "if this had been Mr. Coffin's boat 'stead o' youn', he'd a' ordered us all on our knees to gie's thanksgivin' for 't."

The old whaler meant neither rebuke nor reproach to Mr. Ransom for not doing likewise. Instead, the very opposite, for Grummell was rather a weak-kneed Christian, and his remark was of the scowler's kind, intended as a jest. But the young officer, though more cheerful now, was not in the mood for jesting. He felt responsibilities still weighing heavily upon him, and rejoined in grave, serious tone:

"Mr. Coffin might have been right to do so. We owe Heaven a thanksgiving, if ever men owed it. Just think of our position but ten minutes ago, and see what it is now! Here we are riding safe between walls of water as the Israelites in the Red Sea. One can't help thinking that the hand of the Omnipotent has had something to do with it. Let us so believe it, then, and do as Mr. Coffin would have done—give thanks to God for this miraculous mercy."

The young officer's appeal was all the more powerful from our knowledge of his character—anything but of the Puritan type. It was not needed, however. One and all of us felt the gratitude he was asking us to give—had already given it in our hearts, if not with our lips.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SAFE IN THE "SLICK."

THROUGHOUT the remainder of the night we lay in the whale "slip," feeling safe for the time, but withal filled with anxiety as to the future. What would the morning reveal to us? Would it but show us the seas mountains high, in the same drear monotony as of yesterday? Or might our eyes be gladdened by the sight of a ship? Even one battling with the storm would give us hope; for she might descry the smooth water of the *slip* and make for it, as ships in foul weather often do.

So ran our thoughts and conjectures, hope and fear in turns uppermost, till the sun rose again. But not to cheer us; instead, deepening our despondency. Its beams of a sickly yellowish hue, thrown aslant the waves, showed them in wild commotion as ever, and lashed by a wind in which there was no sign of abatement.

It seemed almost useless to mount up the mast and look abroad. No ship was likely to be there, for any caught in such a storm would be almost sure to lie-to; and as there was none visible at the sun's going down, the chances of our seeing one now were poor indeed.

Still one might have been "scudding" before the wind, which would make a difference; and, however faint our hopes, instinct impelled us to turn our eyes to the sea.

As before, the mate mounted to the clumsy cleft, and after him Grummell. Both to come down again, with the same dismal tale—no sail seen, nothing.

Our thoughts now turned to our stock of provisions and stores of water. What was there left of

them? A question of more importance than ever, its seriousness each hour increasing.

With fair weather and favoring wind, there had been a chance of their holding out till we reached the Foxes. But delayed by the storm—a thing we had not taken into calculation—that chance was not only diminished, but well-nigh gone.

While the biscuits were being counted, as a preliminary to eating the sparest of breakfasts, and the water-keg gauged to ascertain its exact contents, Mr. Ransom, with unimpaired faith in my keenness of vision, handed me his telescope, saying:

"Mount up, Macy, and take a look around."

I did as commanded: to see, almost as soon as I had got steadied on the alert, with the glass to my eye, what gladdened my heart, as my words must have done that of every one in the boat on hearing me cry out, "Sail ho!"

No sail was it either, in a literal sense, since I saw not a rag of canvas. Only the top timbers of a ship, bare spars, and rope rigging, which oscillated to and fro, see-saw fashion, over the combing of a wave.

"Whereaway?" called up our boat's commander. "Starboard bow, sir, inclining to beam."

She was doing this; for while I watched her I could see she fell off several points to leeward.

"What do you make her out?" interrogated the mate; "barque or ship?"

"Ship, sir; square-rigged on the mizzen—a large vessel."

My answer begot disappointment. There had been hope of its being a barque—our own.

"What's she doing?"

Just then the stranger was heaved up on a swell, enabling me to give a correct reply:

"Lying-to under goose-winged maintopsail, and

"Come down; and let me have a squint at her."

Of course it was the mate who thus commanded; and I dropped back into the boat, returning him his telescope.

Up he went, taking my place and bringing the glass to his eye. Then, after a second or two spent in examining the strange ship, he cried out:

"By Jupiter! It's the Scotch whaler; the very vessel whose drug we've got in our boat. I remember her rig to a rope. And lying-to, as you've said, Macy; but losing ground to leeward. So much the better for us, 'twill bring her the nearer."

Needless to say, we were all now in a state of the highest excitement. One more chance for life had presented itself; a tolerably sure one, should our situation become known to the people on board the Scotch ship.

But would it? That was the question still doubtful of answer. Falling back before the wind, herself doing battle with it, she would soon be on our beam. But even then at a distance of not less than a sea league; while over such a rough, ragged surface, our speck of a boat stood slight chance of being descried. The huge cetacean buoyed high above the water by its inflating gases had a better—this by good luck in our favor.

"Out with the flag, and run it up!" commanded the mate. "That will do something. Fortunately, there's a clear sky, and the wind will keep the bunting at full spread."

Quick as could be, it was hoisted to the mast's head, and fluttered out to its full, crackling like a whip.

But to elicit no answering signal from the Scotch ship; certainly she did not see us.

By this she was nearly abeam, and still dropping down wind, so fast as to bring all our fears back again more intense than ever. We had enjoyed a gleam of hope, which seemed given but to tantalize us. And now it was about to forsake and again cast us into the depths of despair. For if the ship held on to her course, involuntary as we knew it was, she would, ere long, be out of sight again, and then what of us?

No one asked the question, for it needed neither asking nor answering. All knew that death threatened us, if not by drowning, from hunger and thirst. That it was imminent, too; for our store of food and drink, now taken stock of, had proved less than expected. There was but enough for one meal—that breakfast which might be our last.

Visions of prospective hunger and thirst, with all the horrors appertaining, were in our mind's eye as we watched the movements of the strange vessel, with earnest, eager endeavor to interpret every maneuver she made.

She is abeam now, and there is no longer doubt as to what ship she is. Certainly the Scotch whaler the Highlander, of Aberdeen. This could be told without the telescope; for we had all seen her in the Polar Basin several times, and once our barque had spoken her while cruising on the same ground. Would we could speak her now! What would we not have given to be sure of some on board of her catching sight of our boat?

To these anxious, though unexpressed, interrogatories we received no cheering response, none of any kind. No signal-flag ran she up answering ours; no change of sail to tell she had sighted us. Still surely was she falling off before the wind, and faster than ourselves; for we, too, whale and all, were making lee way. In time, and soon, she would pass out of sight again, leaving us lone and lorn.

In their impatience, some of the boat's crew proposed cutting loose from the whale and making an attempt to get nearer to the passing ship, by oars or otherwise.

"Impossible!" pronounced our commander, as he ran his eyes over the billows between a very chaos of fierce, foaming water. "The boat wouldn't live in that sea for a minute—not a second. No, boys! Our only chance of safety is the *slip*, and we must stick to it. Odd, too, the ship not noticing that; one would suppose—"

He broke off abruptly, and for a second or two was silent. Then continuing in changed tone:

"I believe she *has* sighted it; else what's her head falling off for? Can it be but a *yawl*? What do you think of it, Grummell?"

"That ain't no *yawl*, sir, nothin' like it," responded the old whaler, in a slow, deliberate drawl, which jarred with our anxious impatience. "Sure enough she *ha*' got sight o' the slick, or the whale itself wi' our boat beside, an's keepin' off to examine 'em."

Certainly the ship's head had fallen off more than is usual for a vessel making to lie-to, and with suspended breath we watched for her next movement.

It was delight to us to see her Mizzen staysail collapse and go down with a *run*, a sign in our favor. Still she might be wearing round for the other tack. But no! Her helm met her again, and obedient to it, we saw her turn her head toward us. *Hurrah!*

Simultaneous was our cheer, and never was lustier sent forth from six pairs of lungs weak as ours were then. For the combined and long-continued strain of toil and anxious vigil had done its work, enfeebling mind as body.

"We're seen, shipmates!" called out our young commander, in a joyous, confident voice. "And we'll be saved if it's possible for the Scotch vessel to bring up alongside us. As I know, she's well manned, and her crew every one of them an A. B. See how she's behaving! There's a sight for a seaman!"

And it was, a splendid sight, as we were all in the mood to admit. Rejoiced were we at beholding the grand three-master now rising majestically on the ridge of a wave, now dipping into the troughs between, but still making toward us by a series of maneuvers that proclaimed the masterly skill and judgment with which she was managed. It elicited cheer after cheer from our little boat's crew, now pretty sure of being saved. We could not withhold admiration from the gallant men hastening to our rescue at life's risk to themselves. For this they were in reality undergoing, every movement made by their ship in that troubled sea being attended with the greatest danger.

Our suspense came to an end when the huge vessel sagged down upon us, and dexterously pitched a rope into our boat. We caught and were ready to haul upon it before slipping the drug line that still attached us to the whale. But the operation of getting under the ship's lee was a delicate one, and before we were close enough to spring up to her chains she had forged on past, almost outside the limits of the slick.

Her crew were clustered in the waist and swarming along the rail; men with bronzed, bearded faces, who looked down on us in kindly sympathy, their arms outstretched to lay hold on us at the first opportunity. One moment they would be twenty feet overhead, in the next so close that the tips of their fingers almost touched ours; but were too far off to be of help. Carefully, watchfully, we waited for the favoring chance; and as again the ship rolled scuppers to, we heard the encouraging words:

"Gather in now—now!"

It was well timed, and my companions were all caught and hoisted up, I alone being left in the boat. In my eagerness I had tripped, and fallen over a thwart.

But the same kind faces were still above, the same dexterous hands; and in an instant after half a dozen ropes, with bowlines at their ends, were flung to me. Clutching one, and slipping it over my head and under my arms, I gave the signal by a wave of my hand, to feel myself jerked lightly up and landed on the rail.

I was saved, but not a moment too soon. For in her next roll the ship's main channel came down upon the boat, that, yielding like a chip, capsized and filled. Then, with another heave of the huge vessel, the warp snapped as a rotten thread, and the gallant little craft, which had so long withstood the shock of stormy seas, was tossed off—a broken, shattered wreck. We, her late crew, saw this with a sense of pain, almost as though it were a human creature—one of ourselves—about being abandoned!

Six weeks later, as on board the *Highlander*, we lay in the outer anchorage at Honolulu, a vessel, barque-rigged, was descried bearing around Diamond Head, which we easily recognized as our own—the Flying Cloud. It was into the night before the rattle of her chains told she had chosen a berth, and was casting anchor, at but a short distance from the Scotch ship.

The generous skipper of this placed his gig at our service, and without losing a moment we pulled off for the barque.

"Boat ahoy!" came the hail as we drew near. "Who are you?"

"Castaway Clouds," returned Mr. Ransom. "From Bristol Bay."

"God bless me!" we could hear Captain Drinkwater exclaim, at the same time seeing him spring up on the rail. "Can it be possible? Ransom, is that you?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"And the others? Are they all with you?"

"Every one, sir! They're all here, in the boat."

"God be praised!" he ejaculated in a voice choking with emotion. Possibly at that moment he recalled another castaway boat that had got back to the barque with one of its crew mysteriously missing. And like as not Mr. Coffin may have been thinking the same; for we heard his voice, too, in devout tone, adding an "Amen!"

We were soon on board the barque, receiving the congratulations of our old comrades, who danced about the deck with joy. And our tale being told, we got theirs in return. For days they had cruised over the ground where we had parted from them,

searching far and near, hoping against hope. And failing to find us, they had at length given it up, in the belief our boat could not possibly have survived the gale, which had been the heaviest of that season.

Independently of the delight we felt at being once more on board our dear old barque, it was a fine sight to witness the behavior of her skipper. An exhibition of humanity, true and grand, was that of the brave man shedding tears, as he received us on the quarter-deck, embracing us one after another. An episode none of us were ever likely to forget; no more than we had forgotten God's mercy in having preserved our lives, by means almost miraculous.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A SLIP THROUGH THE SURF.

During the interval of forced separation from our comrades of the Flying Cloud, they had killed another whale; odd enough, the very one we had been compelled to cut loose from. With Mr. Ransom's harpoon in him, and several hundred fathoms of line trailing after, the old "nor'-wester" had turned up again near the barque, before the gale set in, and was secured by the first mate's boat. This completing the Cloud's cargo, she was on her way home, and had put in at Honolulu, solely to inquire if any homeward-bound whalers had called there, and whether anything had been heard of us. With little hope, however; and so much greater the joy of our old shipmates on our rejoining them.

Once more back in New Bedford, and all hands having had their proportion of the profits dealt out to them—rather a handsome dividend—I was this time less derelict of filial duty, and so paid a visit to my mother. It was now I learned that adversity had overtaken her; which, luckily, I was able to relieve.

All the more need for my continuing a sea life, and some reason why she should no longer object to it; which she did not. I had grown to be a man, and she seemed much pleased with me; glad to think her wayward son had turned out better than she expected, though still without any higher distinction or title than the right to attach to his name the two initial letters of the alphabet, A. B.

Possibly the old pride of having had a naval officer for her husband was a little taken down by the thought of her son being only a common sailor. But, if so, before bidding her good-bye again, I had the pleasure of communicating a fact which had in it something in the way of compensation. It reached me in a letter from New Bedford, bearing the signature of Captain Drinkwater, with contents as follows:

"DEAR MACY: I am fitting out the Cloud for another bout at blubber-hunting; this time to try the other two oceans—Atlantic and Indian. So, if you're still inclined for the Chase of Leviathan, and will continue it on board the old barque, I can offer you a berth. I've chosen all my officers except the second mate; and if you care to be that, the post is at your service. I'll keep it open till I hear from you.

"Cordially yours, R. DRINKWATER.

"P. S.—Coffin's not going with me on this voyage. Bostock, of the Saucy Sarah, bound for somewhere in the South Atlantic, has offered him tempting terms, and he has accepted them. But I hope and rather think, his defection from the Cloud won't be the cause of yours."

The "rather think," underlined as it was, struck a responsive chord in my heart; of itself some reason for accepting the post offered me. Despite all my wish to have a friendly feeling for Lige Coffin, I could not; could never forget that scene when with his whale-spear held threateningly over my head, he called out to me: "Remember Bill!"

Of course, I wrote back to Captain Drinkwater acceptance of his offer, with all due expressions of thankfulness therefor. And the day after, following up my letter, I was once more on board the Flying Cloud. But not as before. Now feeling different in every way, with the right to tread her quarter-deck, and intrusted with a high command.

I found other changes besides that of the first officer. Grover, the third, was gone, too, with many of the old hands. They had left her, not from any special dissatisfaction, but solely that instinctive desire for change peculiar to men who make the sea a profession, and more than any those who follow up its most attractive specialty—whale-chasing.

Fitted out complete for our new enterprise, we set sail again, and ran down the Atlantic, in shortest course, for the Indian Ocean. Should we fail to obtain a full cargo in the latter, it was our intention to take the former on our way home, for filling up.

Putting into Cape Town for a supply of fresh provisions and water, we there heard of cetaceans having of late appeared in great plenty along the East African coast, and especially around Madagascar. Enough to justify a deviation from the point we originally aimed at—this Kerguelen's Land, otherwise known as the "Isle of Desolation."

Choosing the Mozambique Channel for our first cruising-ground, we were in it without delay, looking right and left for Leviathan. Soon to discover that the tales we had been told were neither more nor less than downright fabrications meant to mislead us. The Cape whalers had themselves gone to Kerguelen's Land, and it was not desirable that we, strangers to the South African port, should have any share in the great "catch" expected to come off there.

Disgusted with the deception that had been practiced upon us, and our want of luck in the Mozambique Channel, we determined to leave it without loss of time, and strike for our original destination. But needing some ship's stores, we brought to opposite one of the ports on the East African coast; a

miserable settlement of the colonial kind, acknowledging the rule of the Braganzas.

The captain himself first went ashore, to make sure the required articles could be had, before bringing the barque into the anchorage. I was with him in charge of the boat, and we supposed everything could be done in an hour or two.

How little did we understand the crooked ways of Portuguese diplomacy! We learnt them there, however, by a lesson longer than we had anticipated, or was agreeable to us. In that obscure corner of the King of Portugal's dominions there was as much red tape as if it had been the port of Lisbon itself. No business could be transacted without sanction of the "authorities," and those of the Custom House were a swarm of garrulous officials who loitered lazily about without seeming ever to do anything. As a result of their supineness the whole day passed, and still our errand was unaccomplished.

I had left one man in the boat, to take care of her, allowing the others to stretch their legs on land, myself among the number. Several hours were spent strolling about the place, luxuriating on oranges, and other tropical fruits, while we made study of the odd specimens of humanity presented to us in the "Ethiopian Portugee." But long before night, having had enough both of them and their fruit, we returned to the boat, and there awaited the captain.

It was twilight when he came down to the landing; then only to let us know that not having finished his business, he intended staying on shore for the night.

"Take the boat back, Mr. Macy," he said to me; "and see to keeping the Cloud close in as is prudent, so that she may be ready to run up to the anchorage early in the morning."

As already said, the barque had not yet been brought to anchor, but was lying off and on outside, till sure we could get the things.

"By the way," he added, "I've engaged a pilot to run her in, and you'd better take him on board with you. Here he is."

At which he introduced me to a man who was sauntering behind; a sallow half-caste, wearing a hat with brim broad as a spread umbrella, and whom he addressed by the high-sounding name, Señor Salvador.

"Bear a hand," said the captain, in conclusion, "and get within sight of the barque's lights as soon as possible. It's looking lowery out in the weather."

And with this last word of caution, he turned back toward the town.

I could see it was looking lowery ahead, and so also could Señor Salvador, who seemed greatly disinclined to go with us. But the captain having booked him, he stepped into the boat, and priding himself on his proficiency in the English tongue, said, as we shoved off:

"Bad temp come—lookeye yonner."

"Goin' to blow, ye think?" asked the man at the midship oar, an old salt whose knowledge of Portuguese was about on a par with the other's English. "Sopler, eh, vent?"

"Vent, no—no mooch," was the pilot's confident answer; "more chuve—water."

"Oh, let it shore, if that's all," rejoined the oarsman; "we ain't either salt or sugar. Just you oier for the ship's lights, Master Broadbrim, an' we'll soon set ye on board o' her."

"Si—si, goot! me savey. Pool right head."

While this quaint dialogue was passing, we shot swiftly out through the still waters of the bay, under the impulse of long and regular oar-strokes, till the tossing motion of our light craft admonished us we had met the swell of the broad Indian Ocean. By this time the night's darkness was down, darker from the sky having become thickly overcast, while a few large rain-drops clouthing against our cheeks seemed the ominous forerunner of a heavy fall, such as only the tropics know.

Straining my eyes about, I looked for the barque's lights, but they were nowhere to be seen. Nor yet, after we had rowed a considerable distance further out; not a spark or gleam was visible anywhere.

The pilot was seated in the stern-sheets beside me; and, his face being close to mine, I could note on it an expression of uneasiness, if not actual alarm. Evidently he was aught but satisfied with the situation.

"What is your opinion of it, Señor Salvador?" I asked, in the most intelligible *lingo* at my command.

"Dat we better put back—go shore 'gain," was the discouraging rejoinder.

"No, we can't do that, señor, and sha'n't try to. Yet. It would never do to give it up so short. Boys!" I called to the crew, "I know how the barque bears, or ought to bear, and we're on the right course for her. So pull ahead! We'll soon raise her lights."

But we didn't. After rowing for nearly another mile, not a scintillation of them sparkled up to delight our eyes.

Giving the word to cease work with the oars, at the same time ordering the men to keep their eyes about them, I got out the lantern with the fireworks, and hoisted our own light on a waif-pole, hoping the barque's people might see it.

A vain hope and doomed to disappointment. There was no responsive signal.

By this we were in the midst of big waves, something more than the ordinary in-swell. For, besides the threatening rain, gusts of wind had begun to blow fierce and violent enough to raise white crests around us. So when the timorous half-caste again made appeal to me to put back I was no longer in the mood to deny him. I felt less reluctance in acceding to his request as it was rather to be regarded in the light of a command. He was the errant pilot, and would have to bear at least a part of the responsibility. Some *salve* to my feelings in that.

Besides, I now supposed that our first mate, foreseeing a storm, had run the barque further up shore for safety; and to attempt reaching her now in our cockle-shell of a craft, even though we were sure of the direction, would be attended with utmost danger.

Fortified with these reflections, I at length gave the order:

"Boat about!"

CHAPTER XXX.

A FANDANGO.

TURNING to row back, we saw we were not yet out of our dilemma. For neither was there light in that direction nor aught else to guide us. After clearing the harbor on our way outward, we had rounded a rocky spit, which cut off all view of the town, with its three or four dimly-burning lamps; and our pull back was no better than blind guessing.

Broadbrim, however, proved of more service with his face landward than when it was set to the sea, every inch of the shore seeming familiar to him. For all, he could not possibly see the land; and, in giving us steering directions, must have trusted to his ears more than his eyes. And there was something for him to hear, heard by all of us, causing keen apprehension; the roar of breakers seeming continuous all along the shore line, making a milky way that even through the obscurity could be distinguished by its luminous phosphorescence.

To make matters worse, the rain was now on, pouring down in torrents—I might say sheets—still further blinding us. Its first dash drenched us to the skin, though we little regarded the soaking. In that hot atmosphere we rather liked, and would have reveled in it, but for the ugly sound inshore. Besides, it called for bailing out the boat, else she would soon have filled.

Ladling away and pulling on, we at length discerned a light on the land. A mere glimmer, as if from a farthing dip, seemingly shining out through a small window.

"Dat my house!" exclaimed the half-caste, soon as sighting it. "Poolee for it, señors!" he added. "Straight in!"

I had my doubts about the prudence of accepting this direction. But he was the pilot of the port, and should know all. I could not well refuse. So ordered the boat's head set for the light.

Before another dozen oar-strokes had been given, I saw that we were on the edge of a broad sheet of foam, extending right and left; apparently the water breaking over a shoal reef with such violence as would surely wreck us if we ran onto it.

"Stern all!" I shouted, at highest pitch of my voice. "Back oars; back!"

Obedient, the boat's crew backed and pulled off till we felt ourselves in safe water. Then, turning to the pilot to demand his reasons for giving us such a close shave, I saw he was not there. The seat he had lately occupied beside me was blank!

Was he elsewhere in the boat? The question I put to the men; for, in the darkness, he might have shifted to another place without my perceiving it. But to my astonishment came the answer. "No!" from stem to stern, the crew sharing my surprise at his disappearance.

Some sadness there was, too; all of us under the belief that the unfortunate man was gone overboard, to be swallowed up by that ravenous surf. By the sudden backing of the boat he must have lost balance, and got jerked over the rail.

I felt especially sorrowful, thinking the disaster due to myself, however little intending it. But, while we lay-to, listening, my feelings underwent a change, more easily imagined than described, as a voice came over the seething water, gieefully intoned, saying:

"Goot-night, señors! Poolee on roun' de *punta*. Den you see de port lights. Half-mile more, you reach de *praha*, where you beach de boat. Goot-night!"

There could be no doubt of its being Señor Salvador who thus called to us, nor any that he was safe on shore. But how he had made his way there, across that white tract between, was a matter of mystery to all of us. We could only account for it by the supposition, that, from his intimate acquaintance with the surf—at his own door, as it were—he knew the trick of getting through it.

Still, what could be his motive for so taking leave of us, unceremoniously, and without a word of warning as to his intention? That was a question for us to speculate upon, though not there or then. We were too anxious to round the *punta* and reach the *praha* according to his directions, and without further delay we followed them.

In fine, to our satisfaction, after turning the spit, we got once more within the harbor, with the port lights in view, though barely discernible through the rain which still poured down as out of dishes. Bearing for them, we in time arrived at the landing-place; and leaping ashore, made the boat fast to moorings.

Wet as drowned rats, we proceeded on up to the town in search of a shelter. But it was now after midnight, and the houses all shut, everybody seemingly abed. The only exception was a large mud cabin we passed on our way to the *plaza* whose occupants, whatever they might be, were certainly up and awake. While hurrying by it we observed a light streaming through a small aperture of open unglazed window, out of which also came a hum of many voices, with the "tink-a-tink" of some stringed instrument, banjo or bandolon.

Finding no other establishment open, we returned to this music-hall of mud, not for the sake of its harmony, but in the hope of finding a fire to get dry at.

Knocking at the door, after some delay it was opened, by a man of stalwart size and coal-black

skin, a veritable Mozambique negro; who, in the lingo of his country, demanded our business there. Before we could make reply, another man appeared by his side; to our amazement, he who had late taken French leave of us. He had changed his dress, and was now got-up in grand fig, evidently *en fête*.

"Ah, señors!" he said, grinning from ear to ear. "As ee see, I've got here afo' you; glad to speak you welcome; come in all! De place am a leetle bit crowded, but we make room for ye. We's be doin' some dance, an' your worship will honor us join."

He was hardly correct in describing the place as a "leetle bit crowded." It was crammed to suffocation; and by a motley assemblage of humanity, such as could only be met with among the African Portuguese. There were men of every mixture and shade of complexion, from pale sickly yellow to jet-black; women, too, of like varied hues. For we had intruded upon a *fandango*—a ball of the lowest classes of Mozambique society.

The steam that met us on the opening of the door, with the odors which saluted our nostrils, was enough to daunt against entering. But we had set foot upon the threshold, and could not decently withdraw. So, accepting Señor Salvador's "invite," with the best grace possible, we followed him in.

To find, that he was a sort of head man, or managing commissary of the entertainment, with full control over the refreshments. These, which he dispensed to us with hospitable hand, consisted chiefly of fruits, the solid portion of them. But there was liquid also, a vile spirit of the *aguardiente* species, strong enough to upset the stomach of the oldest and toughest blubber-hunter among us. *Nolens volens*, we could not refuse drinking it, though we did so with wry faces.

Señor Salvador was in high glee, and full of *bonhomie* toward myself. While hob-nobbing with him, I sought an explanation of his presence there, and how he had contrived to get ashore through the surf. The latter he made light of, telling me it was an easy thing for one who knew the way. But in snatches of conversation, necessarily brief in the midst of a ball, he failed to make the way clear to me. As to his getting to the town before us, that was understandable enough. From the point where he parted with us, he had only to cross a narrow isthmus, while we were pulling a long reach round the peninsula.

"But why did you not come on along with us?" I asked.

"Ah, señor, you no sayev why? My house on de oder side—you see um. My wife dere too. Ise boun' take she to do fandango; bring on wif me. She here now. Your worship, low me her introduce."

At which, without further speech, I was favored with an introduction to the Señora Salvador. A sprightly dame she was—a quadroon—young and rather comely, with an evident inclination to flirting. After a few minutes spent in her company, it occurred to me, that this propensity on her part might have had something to do with her husband's reluctance to spend the night on board our barque, and possibly rendered him less regardful of danger in taking that short cut through the surf. For he knew she would be at the *fandango* with or without him.

However that may have been, we of the boat's crew were not long inside the mud cabin, till we wished ourselves out of it. What with the crowded room, the steam from wet garments—not only our own, but of others that had entered in a like state of soak—the smell of orange peel, vile spirits, and tobacco smoke—above all that peculiar, and peculiarly disagreeable odor which proceeds from the body of the Ethiopian in a state of perspiration—what with all these, we felt far from enjoying the *fandango*. So, soon as we could find a decent excuse for leaving, we left it, despite all the witcheries of the Señora Salvador to retain us, and the downpour of rain still continuing outside.

Undergoing a fresh *douche*, we hastened back toward the heart of the town in search of more savory quarters. But before reaching the *plaza*, we came opposite a house, larger and of more pretentious style than the common, with an open shed alongside it. The shed looked snug and tempting; at all events it offered shelter from the rain, and as no better might be found, we turned in under it, every rag on our backs running water.

Luckily the night was warm, of true tropical heat, and so the wetting less discommoded us. We rather relished it, and would have been comfortable enough but for the mosquitoes, that, like ourselves, had retreated under cover to escape the rain. But our companions in misfortune proved aught but pleasant ones; instead, took advantage of the situation to bite and sting us *à l'outrance*. Not a wink of sleep did any of us get, till the morning's light, as with witches, chased them away. Then we stretched our wearied limbs along the floor of the shed, on some litter which chanced to be there, and became for a time oblivious.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SUSPECTED PILOT.

THOROUGHLY fagged out with the long spell of pulling and other work of the night, we did not awake till an hour after the sun was up. Then, rising from the litter, and giving ourselves a shake to get clear of filth and countless fleas, I thought it best to communicate with the captain before returning on board the barque, which, of course, now in the morning's light we would have no difficulty in descrying.

So, having sent the men back to the boat-landing, I was setting out to look him up, when a window of

the big house beside which we had slept was thrown open, and lo! the skipper's face in it, with neck craned out and eyes bent upon me!

Our surprise was mutual; but before I could recover from mine, he called out:

"God bless me! Macy, you there! What's brought you ashore? Nothing gone wrong on the Cloud, I hope."

"I hope not, sir. But for that I can't answer."

"Can't answer! Why?"

"Because I haven't been on board of her, since you left us."

"The deuce you haven't! Explain yourself, Mr. Macy."

Which I did, giving him a detailed account of all that had transpired since we parted with him at the landing.

"Odd the pilot having given you the slip that way," he observed, reflectively. "To say nothing of his own danger. But I suppose he's familiar with the reef you speak of, and there wasn't much danger after all. Still, why the devil should he have run any risk, seeing there was no need for it?"

I was about to make answer, giving the pilot's own explanation, when the captain broke out again, exclaiming:

"By Jupiter! I think I know why, now—the cunning scoundrel!"

Saying which he drew his head back within the framework of the window, both it and his body instantly disappearing from sight.

With more astonishment than ever, I kept my ground, awaiting the upshot. I knew he was coming out; and in a few seconds saw him issue forth after a hasty leave-taking with his host, the owner of the house, on the doorstep. Then in hurried stride he came on toward me.

"Mr. Macy," he said, soon as within speaking distance, "did you notice a bag in the stern-sheets—a small canvas bag?"

"Of the boat, you mean?"

"The boat, of course."

"No, Captain Drinkwater, I did not."

"Well, there *was* one. But come along, and let's see if it's there still."

Without further speech, he started off at a rapid pace and with highly excited air; I following in his footsteps, utterly unconscious of the cause that was exciting him.

On arrival at the boat-landing we found her crew on the thwarts awaiting us, and prepared to pull off. It had taken them a time to get ready, for the boat, half-full of water from the over-night rain, had needed another bailing out. This, more than anything else, seemed to concern Captain Drinkwater. For, soon as beside her, he directed his eyes downward, as if in quest of something in the stern-sheets, repeating the question he had put to me, but now addressed to the crew collectively.

To get similar answer, "No." None of them had seen aught of a canvas bag, big or little, in the stern-sheets or elsewhere.

"Now!" cried the captain of the Flying Cloud, emphasizing his exclamation with something very like an oath; "now I know why Señor Salvador left you at such short notice. But never mind! I'll trap the rogue yet, crafty as he thinks himself. I'm not going to ship stores here after all. We can do without them till we reach the Mauritius. So it won't need bringing the barque in to the anchorage. But he sha'n't know that till I have taught him a lesson. I hope he'll turn up to pilot us all the same. By the jumpin' Geehosopat! I'll pay him off in a way he won't be expecting."

As most of these observations were in undertone, and addressed to myself, I took the liberty of asking the irate skipper whether there was anything of value in the missing bag.

"Of course there was," he answered, "or why should I be making a muss about it?"

"Money, I suppose, sir?"

"Money; Spanish dollars; a good two hundred of them. And Señor Salvador has got them, sure. No wonder your finding him at the *fandango*, so free with his hospitality. He could well afford it after such a fine haul."

"But," I said, suggestively, "can't you have him arrested and brought to an account?"

"What would be the use of that? There's no proof of his having taken the money, except his being in the boat with you; and that's good as nothing. Even were there evidence clear as daylight, all he needs doing to rebut it would be to go snacks with whatever judge tried the case. That would sure settle it in his favor. Besides, how could we stay here for a month, it might be a year, for the sake of two hundred dollars? No. There's but one way I can get square with the thief, and that only by his keeping his engagement to pilot us in. Now, however, it's doubtful whether he will. The chances are we'll never set eyes on him again. By Gosh! there he is!"

There was the man sure enough, not fifty yards from us, and coming on in hurried stride toward the boat.

In a minute more he stood beside us, raising his broad-brimmed hat in a salute that would have done credit to Chesterfield; looking calm, smiling, and innocent, as though a charge of theft would have driven him into hysterics.

There was none made against him just then; our skipper, who kept calm also, returning his salute, as he said, in light, cheery tone:

"Good-morning, señor! I've just learnt how the luck was against you all last night in not being able to get sight of the barque's lights. We'll be all right now, and nothing to hinder us from boarding her. So let's into the boat at once."

Into the boat we went, the pilot with us; and, pushing off, were rowed straight out through the bay. But, long before clearing the spit, we saw the barque

lying-to in the offing, and in half-an-hour after we were on board of her.

Then on her quarter-deck occurred a somewhat exciting scene, with dialogue curiously original, the speakers being Captain Drinkwater and the half-caste. The former commenced by saying:

"I suppose, Señor Salvador—I suppose you thought yourself clever last night, in cribbing that bag?"

"What bag, Capitao?" was the counter-interrogatory, in a tone of innocence, assumed, as we, the listeners, believed.

"Oh! the little canvas wallet you took from the stern-sheets of the boat, just before slipping out of her for that bit of swim through the surf. You savey?"

"Sanctos Dios, Capitao!" You speakee puzzle. Me no savey wats you mean—no 'tall at all."

"You soon will," rejoined our skipper, turning face away from the accused man, and commanding sailors to be set for sea.

In a trice they were so set, and the barque holding a course for the outside ocean, the two men in dialogue on her quarter-deck still continuing it.

"Yes, Señor Salvador!" pursued the skipper. "You've stolen my bag and its contents—two hundred silver dollars. But I intend having its worth out of you—in work. You don't leave this ship, till the score's wiped off."

In all my experience of men under surprise, never saw I one showing it in such fashion as did the Portuguese pilot. At first he seemed struck dead dumb; then, recovering speech, protested innocence; in words and tone so appealingly earnest it was like going against truth itself to disbelieve him. He even dropped on his knees, with hands crossed over his breast, crying out:

"Señor Capitao! I am innocent! I never took you' money—never see it—no bag—no not'ing!"

If acting, as all of us supposed him to be, we at the same time gave him credit for histrionic talent of a rare kind. Never was counterfeit done more cleverly.

For all, it failed to affect Captain Drinkwater. Deaf to all appeal, he adhered to his order issued; and the barque proceeded on oceanward, alike regardless of plaint or protest from Señor Salvador.

But before we had run half a dozen knots, there came a change in our skipper's thoughts, favorable to the suspected. The man might be innocent after all, but, whether innocent or guilty, there was a possible question of international law likely enough to turn up, and prove troublesome. Reflecting upon this, it more than pleased Captain Drinkwater to set his captive free, and send him back in a coasting craft which just then happened to come along, in-bound for the port.

Of course we of the Flying Cloud, every man of us, were convinced of Señor Salvador being a thief. But in time we found reason to change our belief, with regret at having ever entertained it. More than any of us was our generous-hearted, justice-loving skipper vexed at what he had done; when, some weeks after, on the boat being overhauled for repairs, his canvas-bag with its contents—the full two hundred dollars—was found under the sheeting boards, whither the rain had washed it!

CHAPTER XXXII.

IN DIRE NEED OF A DOCTOR.

We ran north out of the Mozambique Channel for a short cruise in the seas east of Madagascar. Captain Drinkwater had given up the design of visiting Kerguelen's Land for that season, partly from thinking it too late, and partly because on the day before he had got word of whales being then abundant among the Massarenes. The gentleman in whose house he had passed the night, and who chanced to be an old acquaintance, but lately arrived from the Mauritius, gave him this information, and he determined to take advantage of it.

Hence his having changed his mind about entering the little Portuguese port, as cruising around the Massarenes would be different from around Desolation, and the articles we stood in need of could be better obtained in these islands—either at Bourbon or the Mauritius.

To use the slang of the turf, the "tip" given us this time proved the "correct card," for though the Indian Ocean east of Madagascar is not the most noted of whaling grounds, we found Leviathan there of large size and in goodly numbers. Moreover, we met with a fair "catch," chasing and killing enough to bring the Cloud well down to her load-line.

We had "tryed out," and were stowing down the "fare" or oil they had yielded, the barque lying-to under easy sail. In a whaling-vessel this department is nominally under charge of the second mate. But Captain Drinkwater often superintended it himself, and was so doing on the present occasion.

Clad in canvas frock and overalls, he had gone into the hold, and several barrels had been lowered after him, when I heard him hail up the hatch:

"Mr. Macy! Send me down a forty-two, to go next the shifting-board."

"Ay, ay, sir," I answered, and proceeded to select a cask of the size mentioned, from the tier lashed along the rail.

At the time the wind was light, but with an ugly, tumbling swell, and the barque's canvas out was barely enough to keep her steady. Besides, she had a slight heel to windward, in consequence of some heavy things that had been just shifted over from the lee side. While I was getting the "forty-two" slung, she made a slight weather-roll, so sudden as almost to throw me off my feet, and I was sensible of a jarring throughout the vessel, with a loud crashing noise in her hold, followed by cries which told of something amiss.

I ran to the hatch to inquire what; but before I

could look over its combing, a voice reached me from below, excitedly proclaiming:

"He's hurt—badly hurt!"

"Who?" I called down; "who's hurt?"

"The captain, sir. A cask has shifted—"

I did not wait for more, too truly divining what was meant. A leap downward landed me between decks, and in a stride or two I was in the midst of a cluster of men, who were wrestling with a heavy cask, doing their best to roll it back up-hill against the barque's heel. Their object was painfully evident—to release the skipper's leg, caught and held fast between it and the shifting-board. I had not to inquire how it happened; a glance told me all. The cask had been got up in the "wing," and chocked; but the sudden weather-roll, displacing the groins, set it free again; and the captain, standing directly in range, was caught by it, as it came bang against the shifting-board. But for his having seized hold of this, and sprung quickly upward, his whole body would have been between. As it was, only his leg was in the ugly trap, but that held fast as in a vise.

That the limb was seriously injured we could not doubt, even before getting a chance to examine it. Captain Drinkwater was not the man to give way to fright or weakness; and his moans, as we released him from his painful position, bespoke suffering of no common kind.

Lifted in strong arms, tenderly as could be, he was carried upon deck and into his cabin, where I went with him. Having been longer his companion than the first mate—and, I may add, more intimately his friend—the duty of looking after the injury was naturally conceded to me. But when I pulled off his overalls, or to speak more correctly, cut them off, I would have been but too glad for some other to have had charge of it. A frightful wound it appeared, the chief damage being just below the knee-joint. Fortunately, this had escaped, as also the foot, from his having been caught by the "quarter" of the cask, and the latter being below the point of contact, as the former was above it.

But between there was injury enough; and, at the first glance, judging by its flattened appearance, I believed the bone to be crushed.

"Yes; it's smashed to pieces, Macy," groaned the suffering man, soon as he saw it stripped. "I'm a goner at last, after good twenty years at blubber-hunting. But it's hard to end life in such a fashion; like a rat taken in a trap. By Geesophat, it is hard!"

"Oh, sir!" I said; "don't talk of ending life. It's not come to that yet, nor anything like it. You'll get over this safe enough."

I confess that I felt myself talking as it were uphill. For looking at that leg all black and blue, at first flattened out, but as I could see, rapidly swelling to an equally ominous rotundity, I had little hope of his life being saved. All the less from knowing there was not a man on board who had the slightest surgical knowledge; I myself as ignorant as any of them. We were just as so many rustics on a lone country road, around some poor wagoner, with leg crushed under the wheel of his ponderous vehicle. Nay, worse; for to him a doctor may be fetched in fair time, while for the captain of the Flying Cloud there was no such chance or hope, not a man with surgical skill within less than a hundred leagues.

Feeling utterly unnerved, and not knowing what to do, I took counsel with the first mate, who was troubled as myself about the skipper's condition. The result, our agreeing to run for the nearest port, where a medical man might be found; which the barque's reckoning told us to be the Mauritius. And having dressed the wounds in the best way we knew of, without further delay we set sail toward it.

Unluckily the Isle of France was at least a hundred leagues distant; and even with the wind favoring would take days to reach it; blowing adverse we might be weeks. Little as I knew of wounds, that Captain Drinkwater had received seemed every hour growing worse, unmistakable symptoms of inflammation having set in. In a council, including all the officers, with the men most noted for experience, it was thought that only by amputation could the captain's life be saved.

But then who the one to perform it? This was the question remaining unanswered.

To get answer to it, a muster was ordered on the quarter-deck. The summons extended to every soul on board the barque, irrespective of age or rank.

When all were assembled, the first mate, yielding place to me, I put the question:

"Boys! has any of you ever chanced to see a leg amputated?"

There was a short interval of profound, disappointing silence; broken by a shuffling of feet outside the gathered group, evidently some one coming on for the quarter. Instantly after a woolly head with a coal-black face popped up over the shoulders of the surrounding ring, as a voice made answer, saying:

"I'se dic, Mass'r Macy. I'se see'd a ampootashun, sah."

The speaker was the king of our caboose, a venerable Virginian darky, who, from dispensing doses of "domestic" coffee, with pills of duft and salt junk, was facetiously styled "The Doctor."

"I'se see dat same," he added, "good many yeern go, when I war cook board de ole Liberty."

"Do you remember how it was done?" I asked, catching at an idea. For it occurred to me the cook might be our very man.

"I'se ought to, mass'r; 'member all 'bout it; seein' as dis chile 'sisted in de operashun. De ole man bossed de job—dat am old Cap'n Gar'ner, ob de Liberty—but I'se lent um a hand, sah, passed um de tools, an' held on to de slack ob de art'ries. Yes, sah; I'se did all dat."

"But was the man's life saved?"

"Oh! yes, sah. We save um life, but not de leg

ob coarse. Ob dat we made a fast-rate stump. After all, sah, dar ain't no diffeequity 'bout a ampootashun. It am all in de takin' up ob de art'ries, an' lookin' out for de turn-a-out. Yes, de turn-a-out. Dat must be keep' solid, sah."

From the confidence with which the negro spoke, and his apparent knowledge of the matter in question, we all felt convinced of his capacity to perform the operation. And, indeed, the captain himself wished it; was impatiently calling for it, under the belief that if the damaged member were not immediately removed, he would not live many hours longer.

Thus urged, we at length came to the decision to have it off.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

DANGEROUSLY NEAR AN AMPUTATION.

In all my life I never remeinder feeling myself under such a weight of responsibility, as when we had determined on cutting off the skipper's leg. For, although I was but one among others, there was a sort of tacit understanding that the amputation was to be under my especial charge; and, if it should fail, there might be those who would attach blame to me. Besides, if successful, what after? To think of the brave old sailor—tar of the truest type—limping about on a wooden leg, with the profession he had followed for long, long years, as it were, brought to an abrupt end! It was like depriving him of life itself.

But there seemed no alternative; certainly none contemplated by himself, for he kept on crying out for the operation, almost commanding it; and, however reluctantly, I saw the necessity of compliance.

The general consultation had been held on deck, and after it was over I reentered the cabin, the "doctor" accompanying me, with one or two other attendants. It took a strong effort to screw up courage and nerve myself for the delicate undertaking. Nor did I altogether succeed; my fingers trembled as I opened the case of surgical instruments; more still, while removing the rust from the fine-toothed saw intended to cut through the bone; and, handling the tourniquet, I felt as if it was about to be tightened around my own throat, instead of Captain Drinkwater's leg!

During all this time the darky was doing his best to encourage me, giving details of that ampootashun board de ole Liberty at which he had assisted; telling me all of what "Cap'n Gar'ner" had said and done. The Liberty's skipper must have been a born surgeon, if half of what his *co-tenant* cook said of him was true. Still, his laudation did little to inspire me with the confidence and courage needed, and the more I advanced with the preparations the more coward I felt myself.

And when at length I beheld the full array of amputating implements spread out on the cabin table, I was completely unstrung. At that moment I could not have carved a roast turkey or round of beef, much less drawn the knife across a human limb, and infinitely less that of my friend, the commander of the Flying Cloud.

Observing my irresolution—almost complete prostration—the "Doctor," with a greenish blush illuminating his sable countenance, said suggestively:

"Doan' ye t'ink, Mass'r Macy, we're betta hab a leetle suthin' 'fores we begin; jess to steady de narves like!"

Nerves forsooth! There were none in the man's organization—could not be. As I watched him drawing his fingers along the edges of the tools, feeling whether they were sufficiently sharp, just as would a butcher about to cut the throat of a calf, the sight sent a freezing chill through my frame, into my very bones. His coolness, instead of inspiring me with something of the same, had an opposite effect, driving me almost to the verge of insanity. Just on that account his suggestion to "hab a leetle suthin'," chimed in with my needs, if not my wishes; and, calling to the cabin-boy, I ordered a couple of "fortifiers" forthwith—in the shape of two strong glasses of grog.

Having drank one of them, I soon felt its beneficial influence, so far as to declare myself ready to commence the operation. As for the darky, he had been ready all along, with no more compunction to enter upon it than if the fine-toothed thing he held in his hand were a wood-saw, and the work to be done chopping fagots for a fire.

After gulping down the contents of his tumbler, he again turned to me, saying:

"Doan' ye t'ink, sah, de payshent better hab a drop o' suthin', too—jess to brace hin up like!"

"Yes," I said, assenting; and, in compliance with the suggestion, poured out some brandy into a tumbler, which, slightly diluted with water, I directed the cabin-boy to take to the captain's state-room. The suffering man drank it willingly, desiringly, knowing what it was for. Indeed, with the door standing ajar, he could hardly escape hearing all we said, nor observing the formidable preparations we were making.

"Now, sah," at length said the negro, with a grin almost demoniac. "Rock'n we best put on de turn-a-out."

He spoke with an apparent consciousness of superiority, as though he looked on me in the light of a mere assistant, and was going to take the whole business on himself.

"I'se do it," he added. "But, sah, you must stand by, jess to grab de art'ries."

Even now I could not bring myself up to the ugly work, but recoiled from it with a shudder. Seeing me still unnerved, the negro took hold of the knife, and flourishing it like a very Shylock claiming his bond, said, patronizingly:

"Nebba mind, Mass'r Macy. I'se do de cuttin'; you only hab look after de art'ries."

Beyond any doubt, in another second or so, the

"artries" would have needed looking after, and Captain Drinkwater been minus a leg.

The amputation seemed unavoidable, and I gulped down a second glass of brandy as a last strengthener to undertake it. The "Doctor" felt inclined for another fortifier, too; and well for the patient he did; as the time so taken up was brimful of beneficial consequence. Ere he had returned his tumbler to the table a sound entered the cabin from above—a cry which ever gladdens the mariner, he in distress or otherwise. Faint, as if coming from afar, it was nevertheless distinguishable as the "Sail ho!"

I glided to the foot of the companionway, and there stood anxiously listening. To hear instantly after in the first mate's voice, the interrogatory, "Whereaway?" succeeded by the answer, which, fainter from being aloft and further off, I did not catch. But I got it at second-hand from the first officer himself, who called down the companion:

"Sail off the port beam, Macy. A large ship. Look-out thinks she's a man-of-war. I've run up signals to say we want to speak her."

"Thank God!" I shouted, in very exultation of joy as one just awakened from a horrid nightmare. If a man-of-war, the strange ship would have a surgeon on board; or, in any case, there might be some one capable of performing the operation from which I shrunk.

Turning toward the captain's state-room to report the intelligence received, I was met by the negro, still flourishing the ugly knife.

"Hold!" I cried, snatching it out of his hand, and flinging it down on the table.

"Den, sah, youse doan' intend goin' on wif de am-potashun!"

The question was put with an unfeeling coolness that irritated me almost to madness. For on the man's face I saw, or fancied, an expression of disappointment at not getting a chance to display his surgical skill!

"You fiend!" I exclaimed, in answer. "Clear out! Back to your caboose, or I'll use that knife for cutting your own throat. Begone, you black son of a sea-cook!"

I am not sure that "sea-cook" was the precise term which ended my string of objurgation; but, whatever it might be, the effect was instantaneous—driving the darky up the companionway quickly as ever that stair was ascended.

"Dear Captain Drinkwater!" I said, speaking into the skipper's state-room. "I've good news for you. 'Tis a ship sighted—a war-vessel, they think—so, if our leg must come off, you'll have the satisfaction of it being done in a proper manner."

"Well, Macy, my boy," he rejoined, "that's something to be thankful for."

His face beamed brighter at the prospect of the amputation being, at least, skilfully performed, and so safer. No wonder this should gratify him, after overhearing what had passed between me and the man so fain to have been his butcher.

Leaving him in the care of the steward, I hastened upon deck. To see bearing down on us a grand ship, of character no longer doubtful. For surely had she been made out a man-of-war; a corvette she was, flying French colors.

The sea calm, with but enough breeze to keep sails full, and she on the weather side, we were soon close enough for an exchange of speech.

"Barque, ahoy!" hailed the Frenchman. "What do you want?"

"A doctor," was the response called back.

"Tristan! We'll send you one."

Our appeal, as we expected, was answered in a way befitting the men of a nation foremost in the ranks of civilization and humanity. Promptly was it responded to; for on the instant after one of the corvette's boats was lowered and rowing toward us. Ten minutes more, and it was under our main-chains; when we saw seated in the stern-sheets a man whose mien bespoke him a disciple of Esculapius. But one of the oddest sort we had ever set eyes upon; a little dried-up fellow, with more hair under his head than on it. Yet with eyes all intelligence, full of promise as to his professional skill.

When I grasped his hand as he came scrambling over the rail, I could have hugged him to my heart. For his presence might be the saving of a life, dear to me almost as my own.

Our first officer having all along kindly left everything to me, I led the French surgeon down to the cabin, on the way making him acquainted with the circumstances. But minute details were not needed. When he saw the damaged limb, he seemed to comprehend all at a glance, giving it, as I thought, a too cursory examination. Perhaps it appeared to him a hopeless case; though the expression on his features, which I watched with anxious earnestness, did not bear me out in my doleful conjecture.

Returning into the cabin, I ventured to put the interrogatory, speaking in a half-whisper:

"Are you willing to perform the amputation?"

"Amputation!" he exclaimed in surprise, speaking English as he best could. "Pourquoi dat, monsieur? Vat for you talk of amputation?"

"Isn't it necessary for saving his life, that the leg be cut off?"

"No, sair; not no more necessaire dan to cut off zo head."

"But the bone's crushed—is it not?"

"Majol, no. Zo bone it is still good; sound as von cloche. All it vitt need is zo wound to be vell dress, and den quiet with zo patience. Soyez tranquille, monsieur. Your capitaine will be vell as ever—dans un noys."

If I felt inclination to hug the little man before, I could now have kissed him, despite his formidable beard. His words were like new life to me.

He at once set about making them good, by dressing the wound skillfully and "vell," as he said it should be; then prescribing, and himself mixing the

medicine to be taken. After which, giving minute instructions how it was to be attended to, he took leave of us, and was rowed back to the corvette.

And his words did come good. In less than a month from that day, Captain Drinkwater was walking the deck of the Flying Cloud, with two legs under him instead of one—both sound as they had ever been. But I never could afterward pass the galley, and see that black face grinning out of it, without feeling inclined to give it a good slap.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A MYSTERIOUS CRAFT.

A peculiarity of the oceans in most seas is, that one day they will be all about a ship in plenty, while on the next not a spout may be visible.

Just thus was it with the whales we had been so successfully chasing around the Massarenes. After parting company with the French corvette, as though she had frightened them off, or rather attracted them along with her, we found not a "fish," all having abruptly and unaccountably disappeared from our cruising ground.

It was a little tantalizing, not to say vexing, with our fine take continuing, but a few days later we would have made a fine haul and completed the Cloud's cargo. For that we would now have to seek the materials elsewhere; as it would never do to go home with a ship but three-quarters full.

Calling at Port Louis in the Mauritius to replenish stores, we worked on down the Indian Ocean, without the barque becoming any heavier in her lading. Not a whale worth flinging iron into came across our track.

At length Captain Drinkwater, who had recovered from his accident and was himself again, proposed running west into the Atlantic, and trying around Tristan d'Acunha. We should be pretty sure of finding whale there; at least enough, if the luck was in our favor, to give us the "fare" of oil we still stood in need of. Besides, it would be so far on the way homeward. So, for Tristan d'Acunha we steered.

Though with every voyage I had yet made, the Atlantic necessarily saw its commencement and termination, yet, in this the best known and most traversed of the oceans, I had hitherto never met with an adventure worth speaking of; nothing beyond such incidents as are of common occurrence to every ship at sea. Nor can I call what I am about to relate any adventure of mine—if "adventure" it could be called. For it was only an episode; though one of a somewhat singular kind, and for a while painfully affecting myself as others.

Around Tristan d'Acunha we chased the southern "right whale," which differs from the species so named of northern latitudes; and as the luck did run in our favor, we got good return for our trouble. Sport, some would call it; and we might ourselves have thought it so at an earlier period. But, after months spent in chasing Leviathan, the most ardent blubber-hunter grows weary of it; and then nothing likes he better than to know, that every cask is full, and see sails spread for home.

Just so was it with us of the Flying Cloud. After a few weeks' cruising around Tristan d'Acunha, the barque was at last down to her load-line, and every heart on board of her fled to rejoicing. Captain Drinkwater was himself in highest glee; so much elated, he could scarce refrain from exhibiting in a *pas de deux* upon the quarter-deck. Indeed, ever since recovering the use of the leg so nearly lost to him, he seemed to delight in dancing about.

When the "tryng fires" were finally extinguished, and every cask of oil safe stowed down, he called out:

"Now, boys! let's crown our cruise by drinks all round! Steward! open the Cloud's lockers, and turn out the materials!"

The order was obeyed with alacrity; and, in due time, the barque's quarter-deck became a scene of festivity, every soul on board taking part in it, old and young, deck hands as the denizens of the caddy. It was a scene only to be witnessed in a whaling vessel, where all enjoy certain rights and privileges, already alluded to.

We were in the midst of our hilarity, the barque gliding smoothly along under a light breeze, when the look-out aloft shouted:

"Sail ho!"

"Whereaway?" called up the captain, in the customary form of interrogative.

"Nigh dead ahead, sir. A point or two on the starboard bow," came the response from him at the masthead.

"What do you make her out?"

"Only a boat, sir."

"A boat!" exclaimed the skipper, surprised, as were all of us. "But do you see no ship?"

"No, sir. There's no ship in sight."

"Look well round! There must be a ship somewhere."

An interregnum of silence succeeded, while the look-out was making survey of the sea, all of us awaiting the result with a feeling of keen curiosity. We had made nothing from Tristan d'Acunha, at least a hundred leagues, and knew it to be the nearest land. And for a boat to be in our neighborhood, without the ship it belonged to, was naturally considered an odd circumstance—indeed, of the oddest. Had it been in the South Pacific, with its clusters of archipelagoes, we might have thought less of it; but in the South Atlantic, that wilderness of water, where Tristan d'Acunha and Nightingale Island are as two lone stars in the wide firmament of heaven, it surely meant something strange.

But was the boat by itself, or not? This the question passing among us, as we stood listening for further words from aloft.

It came at length, only to confirm what the look-out had already told us.

No ship in sight—no sail of any kind—nothing but a boat.

"Has she a sail set?" demanded the captain; to receive answer in the affirmative.

"What do you see in her?"

"Nothing at all, sir."

"The deuce you don't! But there must be men—her crew!"

"Can't see a soul, sir. If there's any in her, they're lyin' down under the thwarts."

"By the jumpin' Gechophat!" exclaimed the skipper, with a mystified look, "that is odd. A boat with sail set, and nobody to look to it—nobody in her! Mr. Macy!" he added, turning to me, "go aloft, and see what you can make of it."

Obedient to the command, I was soon alongside the look-out; who, indicating the direction, surrendered up his telescope.

Bringing it to bear on the thing that was causing us so much surprise and conjecture, I saw it was a boat, sure enough under sail, as the man had reported, and apparently without any one in her! Looking along the gunwale line, I could see nothing to tell of human being there! Yet was her canvas spread to its utmost inch, and sheeted home!

"Well, Macy, what do you make her out?" was the interrogatory which came up to me from the captain.

"Can't make her out anything, sir," was my answer, no doubt very unsatisfactory to all on the deck below. "It looks like a whaler's chasing boat, stern toward us, and standing on our own tack."

"But can you see no ship?"

This question called for time to answer it. As yet I had only bent my eyes on the boat; but now directed them to the sea around, with the glass to aid my vision. The day was unusually clear, a bright sun in the sky, and the sea so calm that the horizon showed a smooth level line, with nothing to interrupt its continuity. The boat was there, but certainly no ship, near or afar.

Reporting this, I could hear the skipper say:

"By Jing! there is none, if Macy can't see her."

Then followed exclamations telling of increased astonishment. Had it been a ship instead of a boat, there were those on the deck below who would have been thinking of the "Flying Dutchman," even to believing it her. For, strange to say, no vessel, whether war, merchantman, or whaler, but has among her crew men who cling in full credence to this old myth, despite the centuries of so-called civilization.

"A boat all by itself!" went on the captain. "Sail set and nobody in it! What the mischief can it mean? We must run on to her and see. If I go, Macy!" he called up to me, "how's she holding now?"

"Still the same as ourselves, sir; north, and right ahead of us."

"Give steering directions, then, and let's run up to her."

Which I did; and, with but slight change of course, the Cloud was set head for the mysterious craft.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A CREW OF SKELETONS.

Opp as it was for a small sail-boat to be alone on that limitless expanse of ocean, her behavior seemed even more so. A mystifying puzzle to us, when having run several knots after her, with signals up all the while, we got neither response nor acknowledgment.

Nor did we gain greatly upon her; something, though not so much as expected. In the light breeze her broad sheet of canvas carried her along at a rapid rate; while the barque, heavy from being "clockful," and low down in the water, of course made much less speed than she was capable of.

All that was comprehensible; but not this fact of the boat endeavoring to make away from us, whether designedly or not no one could as yet say; but if her crew were *castaways*, as we at first naturally supposed them, their behavior was altogether unaccountable. Now it occurred to us that they might be *runaway*, which would put a different construction upon it. Mutineers who had forsaken their ship, after committing some terrible crime—maybe murder? And having reason to think their guilt could be readily brought home to them. Perhaps they had the evidence of it by their side, in the shape of plunder, which they were reluctant to lose by throwing it overboard?

In that case their conduct would be quite understandable, as Cain fleeing from the Divine wrath they would think that every ship seen by them carried an avenger.

"We must overtake them, anyhow," said our skipper, a little nettled at not having done so long before. It touched on his tender point, the sailing capacities of the Cloud. "Only to think," he went on, "that such a mite of a sail-boat should keep us straining after it in this ridiculous fashion! I suppose we'll have to spread more canvas and out sturn's-sails; though that would be like shooting sparrows with a twenty-four pounder. What do you make of her now, Macy?" he added, calling up to me.

"Nothing more, sir, than that she's a whale-boat—a *chaser*."

Of this I was sure; could no more be mistaken, than in the identification of my own coat or hat. Her build, with the screed of bunting at her mast-head—for there was such—the shape and set of her sail, all betokened the craft used by whalers for chasing and harpooning.

My response gave rise to fresh speculation and conjecture among the barque's crew. It touched professional *amour-propre*. If a whale-boat there was less likelihood of those in her being deserters or criminals of any kind. That would be contrary to their character; an experience rare, if not unprecedented. So back came the belief in their being cast-

aways; once more to be met by the question: why were they making away from us?

Before it could be answered there arose a series of incidents, caused by the wind, or rather the want of it; for now there was none. The breeze which had been gradually lightening blew out its last zephyr breath, and our barque lay like a log upon the water, her sails alone showing motion by an occasional clout. Soon after it was the same with the boat to leeward of us, only instead of staying still she reeled round like a drunken man, as though without hand at the steering-oar.

"Dov'n a boat!" commanded our captain. "If we can't overhaul the darned thing with canvas, we'll do it with the oars."

At the word half a score men sprung up to the rail, and became busy with the davits of the quarter-boat. But before they could lower down, the capricious breeze once more came rustling along, filling

seconds after it did the same for the chased boat, and away went both again down wind as before.

It was provoking to say the least of it; and to some of the Flying Cloud's crew something more. There were men among them ever ready to yield to the supernatural, and the strange, weird maneuvering of the pursued craft now seemed to give them

"Bout s'—"

Very different were the ideas of Captain Drinkwater—all the reverse. Now roused to excited activity, he ordered every inch of canvas out, even to studding-sails. And if that should not prove sufficient, threatened sky-scrappers, and moon-sabers.

"By the jumpin' Gebosophat!" he exclaimed, after issuing his orders. "It is curious how that boat's behaving; like a will-o'-the-wisp. If twere a ship instead of a boat, I'd be inclined myself to be leavin' her the Dutchman."

All hands were now at work to strengthen the barque's power of sailing. But before any more canvas could be got up, from the look-out I was able to report a circumstance likely to make increase of sail quite unnecessary. The breeze becoming stiffer was in favor of the barque, while against the boat; and I saw that the distance between them was rapidly diminishing. In due time, and that ere long, we should know what it all meant.

Countering his orders about the additional sails, Captain Drinkwater now issued another.

"Give them the gun!" he cried out. "We've tried them with sight signals, to no purpose. Let's see what sound will do for us."

Our little piece of artillery, kept ready loaded, was run out to the lead.

"Watch for the effect, Macy!" called up the skipper, as the fuse was being put to it.

Which I did with all earnestness, keeping the glass steady on the boat.

The gun was fired only once, no second shot being needed. For as its boom was still reverberating over the water, a man's head showed above the boat's stern; and instantly after another by the step of the mast; then two more further forward, along the gunwale rail.

"What do you see?" questioned the skipper.

"Four men, sir—only their heads." But I soon saw more; the one amidships rising higher till his shoulders and then nearly the whole of his body was in view. He did not spring up suddenly but slowly as with an effort, and I could see that he supported himself by holding onto the mast. He clung to it with one arm while with the other held aloft he commenced waving what appeared to be a handkerchief.

At the same time the other three had raised themselves a little higher, and were signaling also, brandishing hats and bits of rags around their heads in a wild, eccentric fashion.

Soon followed another movement which all on the barque's deck could see—the boat's sail going down with a run, quick as though the halyards had been cut with a knife. It brought her running to a sudden stop, as a bird with broken wing, and she again veered and reeled about. Two more heads were now visible, hitherto hidden by the sail, making in all six.

The mystery was at an end, and there was no further need for using the telescope. Without it I could read the whole story, more than one experience helping me to its interpretation. Castaways, sure. A whale-chaser boat that had got separated from its ship.

And just so it proved. As the barque surged up, looking from aloft and taking stock of what was in the boat, I could see it was a chaser with six men, the full complement of crew. But such men! Emaciated all, to the condition of skeletons; death's pallor on their faces, cheek-bones threatening to cut through the skin, eyes deep sunk in their sockets and glaring with unearthly light.

"Thank God, there are six of them!" I could hear the skipper cry out. "And all living. Thank the Lord for that!"

I knew why he so exclaimed, and the cause of his satisfaction—the echo of an old memory. But his words were hardly out when others followed, proclaiming a fresh surprise; more than one voice, my own among the number, pronouncing a name well known to the crew of the Flying Cloud, "Elijah Coffin." It was he who stood supporting himself by the boat's mast, but so changed it was rather a wonder we recognized him.

"My God!" cried the captain. "Is that you, Coffin? Is it yourself, Lige?"

"All that air left o' me, Cap," came the answer in his weak voice, but with the old sepulchral tone, now strangely appropriate. "Tain't much, as ye

vorables; and we began to speculate on the pleasures that awaited us at "Old Bedford," as American whalers often affectionately call it, despite its distinctive prefix "New." We had heard that, in the interval of our absence, oil had gone up in price, and as the Cloud carried a full cargo, of best quality, we anticipated handsome returns from our shares; which with most of her crew meant "high jinks" to follow.

But we were not yet at New Bedford, hundreds of leagues still separating us from the famed whaling port, and a stretch of sea to be sailed through dangerous as any in all the oceans. Just as if to reinforce this, before we had made lat. 30°—thus

the Bermudas—a series of adverse gales forced us far out of our course: westward and almost back down the Bahamas. They carried us into the Gulf Stream, however; and if we could keep in that, northward would be easy, and all go well; that is, wind and weather changing in our favor.

But the luck was against us and neither did; the worst, lack of all our being south of Cape Hatteras, with that dangerous headland still to be passed.

We soon after came in sight of it, under circumstances which told of its determination to claim the day. On the day before a night was to blow every way, and baffling all to keep a course for any length of time, had so stiffened as to call for shortening of sail. Topsails had to be taken in to their last reef, while two men were ordered to the wheel, the best steersmen in the barque. Inshore, all along, we could see a belt of foaming breakers; forced upon which the Flying Cloud would never sail sea again.

All on board felt sure of this, to conviction; save one, her commander. He, however, was not yet aware of her perilous situation. It was still early morning, and, having been late to turn in for reasons, alas! too easily understood, he had not yet shown himself on deck.

When he at length did, and looked up at the canvas spread, his first words were:

"What have you reefed topsails for?"

The question was to myself, the officer of the watch on duty.

"I thought it best, sir. It's getting to be a big

gash blow.

"Bah! The barque can carry twice as much tappa as that—if it blew great guns."

"Tappa," the bark-cloth of the South Sea Islands, was a substituted word for canvas, in frequent use among whalers.

"Look at those breakers, sir," I said pointing to leeward.

"Oh, bother them! The Cloud has quick helm, and will easily clear—"

He was not permitted to finish his eulogy on the barque's steering capabilities; hindered by her just then shipping a head sea, which came swishing aft, while a heavy weather roll, and return lurch, set the watch-bell ding-donging.

I thought this would sober the skipper down a bit, and bring him to a clearer comprehension of our danger. But, no, its effect seemed the opposite: and he cried out, excitedly:

"Well done, Cloud! You can wash your own decks, and ring your own bells, anyhow!"

Then turning his eyes landward, while the water was clearing out through the scuppers, he exclaimed:

"Old Hatteras, by the jumping Gebosophat! To see that's worth a score of linters and a whole slateful of figures. Now we know where we are; and if Dick Drinkwater ain't mighty mistaken, we've passed the danger-point."

I was glad to hear this as were all within ear-shot. Still not so glad as we would have been if sure that the skipper was himself. But assuredly he was not; having just had his morning dram, his "throat-clearer" as he was accustomed to call it—and this, added to the night's too-plenteous potations, made him regardless of danger—even reckless of it.

"Give her more *tappa*, Macy," he called to me in tone of command: "what's the use of those scraps of sail? It's like working a ship with pocket handkerchiefs or table napkins."

"I don't think she could carry another inch, sir," I said, in the mildest tone of protest, knowing that positive contradiction would chafe him, and likely lead to his insisting on obedience of the order. "Look, sir, at the topmast back-stays. They're none too good to bear the strain already on them."

"Well, if they won't bear it, why should we be trusting to them. Better to know the worst; that's Dick Drinkwater's way of it. So out with those top-sail reefs, and give the barque a chance. Else it'll be into next year before we get to Bedford; and I want to spend Christmas there. Unreef the top-sails!"

The moment was a critical one; and I was glad to see the first mate coming on deck, my watch being up. Perhaps he would have more influence in restraining the skipper's rashness. And just then something besides turned up to relieve me; the man at the masthead shouting, "Sail ho!"

"A point or two off the port-bow," he answered, after the usual interrogatory.

Half the crew rushed forward; the first mate, telescope in hand, among them. The strange sail was a barque lying to under storm staysails and a goose-wing, almost directly in our track, and not two miles off. Running as we were, in a few minutes we would pass her.

"A whaler!" said the mate, soon as he had the glass to his eye. "Homeward bound like ourselves."

"How do you know that?" asked our skipper, now also on the fore deck.

"By the look of her boats, sir. And more by the copper on her bends, or rather the want of it."

"Pretty sure marks," admitted the captain, taking the glass from the hand of his first officer to satisfy

the usual route followed by vessels from the South Atlantic to the northern ports of the United States lies east of the Bermudas; and we made northward to near the latitude of these isles without encountering any rough weather. Instead, all fa-

himself. Then, after a glance through it, adding in low, agitated voice:

"It is a whaler; and, by Jupiter, the Saucy Sarah herself!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

OUR SKIPPER'S CROWNING TRIUMPH.

The sight of the Saucy Sarah, instead of toning down the skipper's excitement, greatly increased it. And the same with the Flying Cloud's crew; all, or nearly all of whom were *au fait* to the feeling of rivalry which existed between the captains of the two barques. Despite the high running sea, and the dangerous lee shore, it was evident our captain meant a race or something of the kind, most of them seeming as keen for it as himself. Even the first mate, from whom I expected better things, appeared to be smitten with the general frenzy; and I almost wished Lige Coffin back on the barque, in his old position of authority.

"Homeward bound I" exclaimed her skipper, "and hove to! Has anything gone wrong, I wonder?"

And again bringing the glass to bear upon the Saucy Sarah, he more carefully examined her.

"No—not a spar gone; not a rope parted, far as I can see. What can Bostock be thinking of laying to in a bit of a breeze like this? Not wind enough to float a feather!"

"I guess the Sarah ain't much at scuddin'," suggested the first mate. "It takes the Cloud to do that."

"Ah! there you're right," returned the captain, looking pleased at the insinuation so flattering to his craft. "There's not many as can send with the Cloud; and I'll show Bostock what she can do. Up with the main to 'gans'!"

The order was enough to alarm every one, all knowing it must be obeyed. A pet hobby of Captain Drinkwater's was to carry topgallant sails over single reefs; and having now mounted he was sure to ride it.

It was no use remonstrating; the flat had gone forth, so the sail was loosed, sheeted home and hoisted. Fortunately without accident; and the barque yielding to the added strain upon her, seemed fairly to leap out of the water, while the towering seas, rolling and surging in her wake, were impotent to overtake us.

"Mind your helm there!" he shouted to the men at the wheel. "Steer for the Saucy's main-mast!"

"I suppose, sir, you won't pass very near her?" timidly put in the first mate, now, as I could see, becoming himself a little nervous.

"Near enough to speak her, anyhow," snapped back the captain. "My trumpet, steward!"

"It'll be ticklish work, sir," urged the officer. "Even that close, in such a sea as this."

"Nothing of the sort, man. I can shave under her counter if those fellows at our wheel don't go to sleep."

There was not much danger of their doing that; the added canvas giving work enough to keep them awake, to say nothing of their increased anxiety.

Without another word the captain, trumpet in hand, sprung up to the quarter-boat; and passing on to its head, stood majestically erect, as Neptune, or Britannia, ruling the waves!

Meanwhile the commander of the Saucy Sarah, and her officers, had gathered in a group by her taffrail, evidently wondering what was meant. We could imagine, almost see them, shrinking back, as our barque bore down toward them in mad, unchecked career. It was as if we were going head-on to a Chinese pirate junk, or an outrigger of Celebes Malays.

"Barque ahoy! port your helm—hard-a-port!" came the hail from Captain Bostock. "Quick, or you'll be into us!"

"Never fear, Bos," trumpeted back our skipper. "I'm not going through you; only to show how the Cloud can carry sail, and keep course off old Hartmann. Starboard the helm!" he added, contradictingly, to the men at our wheel.

An order they dared not disobey; but just at that moment, the Cloud, as if imitating the obstinacy of her commander, refused to answer their efforts, and made a wayward sheer; to counteract which called for her helm to be jammed hard up.

With suspend'd breath we stood waiting the result; Captain Drinkwater himself dreading it. For the sheer, unexpected as unaccustomed, had spoiled his fine plan. Convinced of its rashness now he sprung back from his perilous position in the boat; though that would not have saved him but for the barque at length yielding obedience to her helm, which she did, swinging round in time, but not a second too soon. We could see 'way in under the Saucy Sarah's counter, as she pitched heavily forward, with stern elevated high in the air, and our quarter-boat barely escaped destruction as it came down again on the *end-a-l*. The two captains were so close they might have crossed trumpets.

But we were clear, or thought so, and as we passed round her wake at race-horse speed, Captain Drinkwater once more bringing the brass tube to his lips, called out:

"How do you feel now, Bostock? Better have a hawser, and let me help you along a bit."

As if to rebuke him for his reckless levity at the last moment, the end of a spare spar, projecting from our stern-hawse, caught the other's spanker-vant; and with a harsh, crashing sound, as we tore clear of it, the gaff came thundering down.

It should have dismayed and silenced our skipper; but it did not. He seemed rather to delight in it, and as we forged on ahead he once more trumpeted:

"Good-by, old Bos! I'm off for Bedford; and will tell your friends to expect you some time about mid-summer. *Au revoir!*"

The captain of the Saucy Sarah made no response, seeming thunderstruck at the other's recklessness, and possibly attributing it to its true cause. When he recovered himself the Cloud had shot far ahead, still carrying our main top-ga'n'sls over single reefs.

It was this, with her maneuvering, of which Captain Drinkwater was especially proud; and as he looked back to see the rival barque falling far away in our wake, he cried out triumphantly:

"I said I'd show Bostock something, and I've done it. So, the Saucy may as well stay in the ditch there for she'll see only our stern till we get into Bedford harbor."

Fortunately by this the wind was lightening again, with a westerly veer in our favor; and we sailed safe past the dreaded promontory, clearing it long ere the sun went down. But during the rest of the day, and for days after, there was no going down in Captain Drinkwater's spirits, having, as he thought, achieved a grand triumph over his old rival.

Soon to be undeceived; and once more was I witness to black chagrin on his bright, good-humored features; as, on entering New Bedford harbor, almost the first vessel we saw was the Saucy Sarah!

And, as if that were not enough to humiliate him, while we were working up to the wharf under the Sarah's stern, Captain Bostock, standing on her taffrail, called out:

"That you, Drink? Glad to see you, old boy! Surprised, too, as you weren't expected much before midsummer!"

But now, as oft before, I also witnessed a fine display of human nature on the part of the Flying Cloud's commander—a triumph of high feeling over low, and a real one for him. The shadow on his face passed suddenly off, to be replaced by its wonted cheerful look, as he laughingly rejoined:

"You've beat us again, Bos, and I acknowledge the corn. So for your damaged gaff, if you'll meet me to-night at the Everett, I'll square that off over a champagne supper. I'm dying for a clam chowder, and a stew of Blue Point oysters."

"So am I, Drink. All right. I'll be there."

And he was there, with all the officers of the Saucy Sarah, to meet all us of the Flying Cloud, and spend together a night of happy hilarity, such as whalersmen, returned from a long and prosperous voyage, enjoy with keenest zest.

But I can recall a still happier one in that same hospitably, occurring some twelve months after, when once more on return from a whaling trip, the rival barques had another sailing bout; this time the contest over a long stretch of sea. It proved indisputably the Flying Cloud's superiority, both in speed and steering qualities; and as we ran far first into New Bedford harbor her skipper could well pay back to Captain Bostock those satirical words spoken the year before.

But he did not; his noble, magnanimous nature restraining him. When the Saucy Sarah was working up to the wharf, this time under our stern, he but said:

"Glad you've got in, old Bos. Meet me with all

the officers at the Everett, and let's have another *lunch*!"

"All right, Drink," was the friendly response.

The two skippers again met under changed auspices; but neither the less inclined to hilarity; nor were we, their subordinates; speaking of myself, I might say more. For I was now the Flying Cloud's first officer; while he, who held that post on the Saucy Sarah, was *not* Lige Coffin. So you may understand why there was no falling off in my mirth.

But indeed on this occasion every one rejoiced to the full; for it was one that commemorated no ordinary event; Captain Drinkwater retiring from active service. In his after-supper speech he made us aware of this, sailor-like, frankly stating the reasons. He had laid by enough to keep him comfortable for life, and why should he go on toiling?

And he did not; but sold off the barque of which he was sole owner, and settled down into the orthodox "sailor's snug harbor"—a neat trim cottage or more properly villa residence over looking New Bedford Bay. It was my happy privilege often afterward to meet him there, made happier from learning, that, on giving up the whalersman's life, he had also given up that which more than once came nigh bringing death to him—the drink.

"I don't care for it now," he said on my last interview with him, "only a taut now and then, say three a day; and that wouldn't hurt a child of pure sound Santa Cruz. As you know I don't care for anything else; wouldn't for the world."

I knew he didn't, and so left him, with a feeling of

certainty as to his being reformed, and that I would again grasp his honest hand, as in reality I did often afterward.

For myself I might tell of many subsequent changes and events, some of them adventures, too. But as my narration may be already thought enough I will only add a few words to wind up with.

For some years longer I followed the whalersman's profession, making several voyages and in different vessels. At length I gave it up, not so much from my dislike for it, but because at older age there came a change over my sentiments. Doubtless my mother, so dear to me, had something to do in bringing that about, for she never got really reconciled to my being a blubber-hunter.

My father had worn navy-blue, with gilt buttons—the Government uniform—and she longed to see me in the same. Her longings at length to be satisfied

in a half sort of way, when I accepted a commission offered me in the revenue service; the same I now hold, more to gratify my dear old mother than from any liking I myself have for it. Indeed, if she were dead, I'm not so sure I wouldn't throw it up

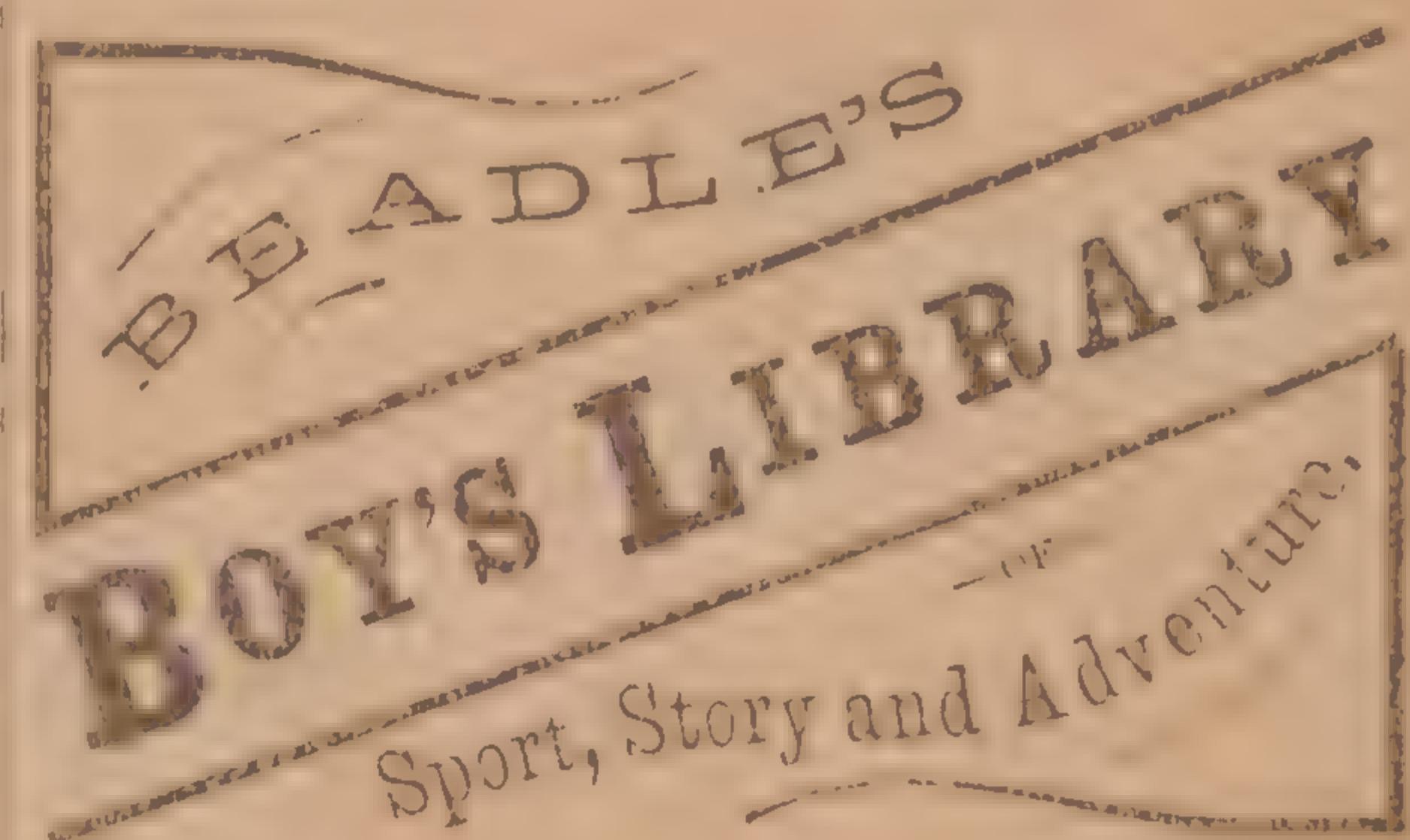
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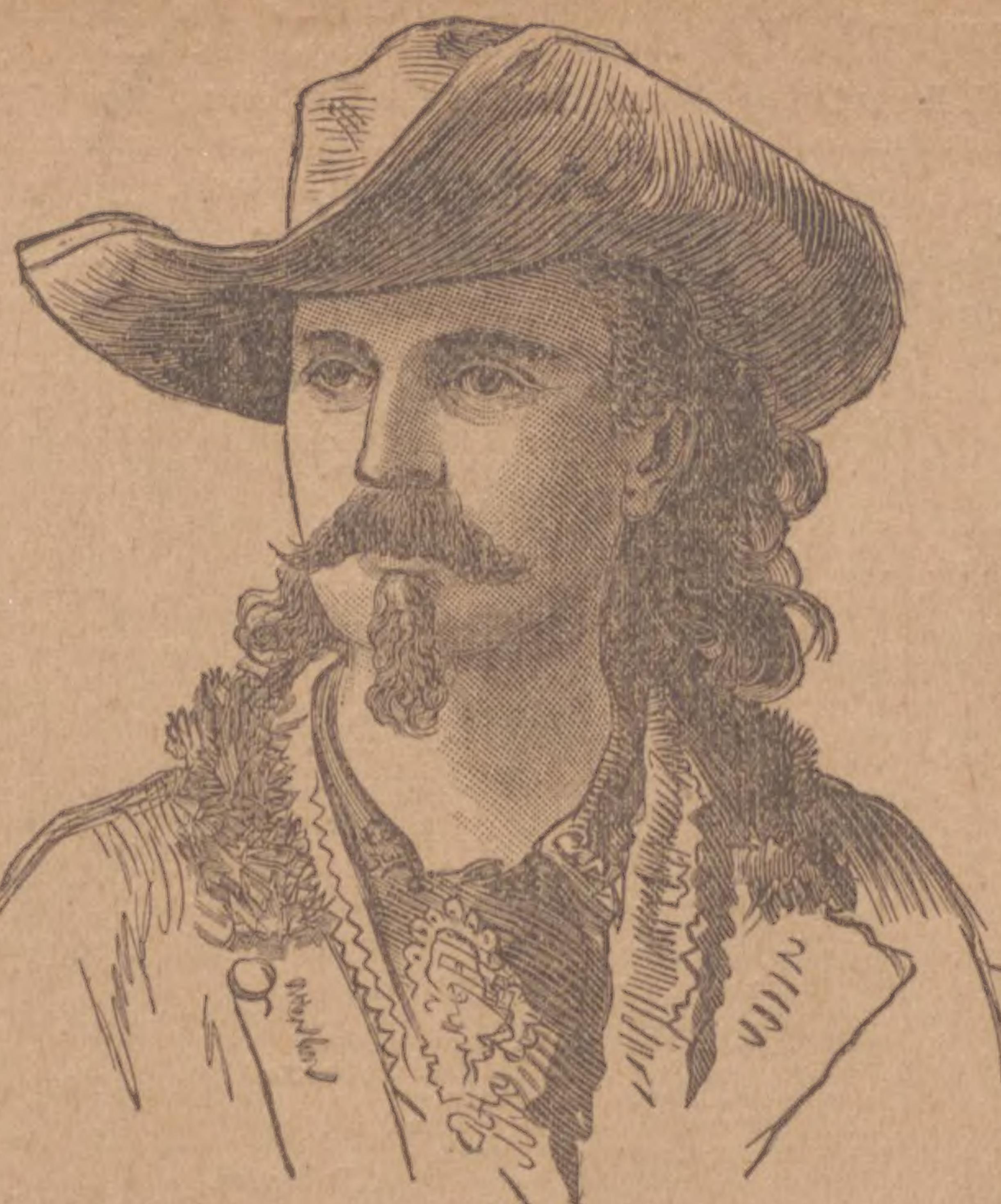
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